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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
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(CEDAW)

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Initial reports of States parties

CAMEROON

99-22520 (E)

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INTRODUCTION

Women have always made a considerable contribution to the development of the society in which they live. However, their contribution has gone unappreciated and, what is worse, they have been held back by a variety of constraints linked with the socio-cultural, economic and political realities.

Accordingly, some time ago, the international community, through the United Nations, opted to establish an egalitarian framework within which women can flourish and play a full part in the life of society.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted by the United Nations on 18 December 1979, is one of the instruments prepared within this framework.

Cameroon, as a member of this world institution, effectively ratified the Convention on 23 August 1994 and fully supports all international instruments in general and those which promote human rights in particular.

This document is intended to meet the demands of article 18 of the above-mentioned Convention which requires States Parties to submit a report on the various legislative, judicial, administrative or other measures adopted to give effect to the Convention and on the progress made in this respect.

Despite the fact that the Convention calls for an initial report within one year of ratification and periodic reports every four years or at the express request of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, this is Cameroon's first report.

The report is in two parts:

- the first part describes the general background to the implementation of the Convention in Cameroon;

- the second part provides specific information concerning each provision of the Convention.

PART ONE

GENERAL BACKGROUND TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW OF CAMEROON

I.1. LAND, PEOPLE AND ECONOMY

1. The land

Situated in Central Africa, at the eastern end of the Gulf of Guinea, above the Equator, between 2 and 13 degrees North and 9 and 16 degrees East, the territory of Cameroon, triangular in shape, covers a total area of 475,000 km2. It is bounded on the North by Chad, on the South by the Republics of Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and the Congo, on the East by the Central African Republic and on the West by Nigeria. In addition, it has an Atlantic coast 400 km long.

Cameroon is notable for the diversity of its natural environments:

- the southern 42 per cent of the country is covered by a luxuriant forest, nearly 20 million hectares in extent;

- the northern part of Cameroon, which has a dry tropical climate, is savannah country consisting of vast prairies on the high plateaux of Adamaoua and steppes in the Far North;

- the West and North-West, which have a wet tropical climate, are regions of mountain ranges which stretch from the South-West coast to the Mandara mountains in the Far North of the country. This mountain chain culminates in Mount Cameroon, an approximately 4,100 m high peak.

2. The people

The first inhabitants of Cameroon were the pygmies.

After them came the Sudanese and Bantu settlers. These migrations were halted by the European invasion (German, French and British) in the nineteenth century.

The population of Cameroon is now made up of more than 230 ethnic groups defined on the basis of dialect and belonging to three broad cultural communities:

- the Bantus of the South, Littoral, South-West, Centre and East provinces;

- the semi-Bantus of the West and North-West provinces;

- the Sudanese of the province of Adamaoua and the North and Far North provinces.

The pygmies, who are not included in this broad classification, live in the Centre, South and East provinces.

Far from being a source of conflict and divisiveness, this ethnic diversity is regarded by government and people as mutually enriching.

The population of Cameroon is estimated to number 13,650,000 (projections based on the general census of 1987) which corresponds to a density of 29.1 per km2.

It can be broken down as follows:

- 51.1 per cent women and 48.9 per cent men;
- 40 per cent under 15, 50 per cent between 16 and 64, and 10 per cent over 65;
- 1/3 in the towns and 2/3 in the rural areas.

Average life expectancy is 59 for women and 54.5 for men.

The illiteracy rate is 30 per cent for men and 50 per cent for women.

The crude birth rate is 38.2 per 1,000; the crude death rate is 10.1 per 1,000; the population growth rate is 2.81 per 1,000.

The general fertility rate is 166.5 births per 1,000 women of child-bearing age.

There are about 4 million foreigners, nationals of various countries around the world, who live peaceably alongside the native population.

The HCR report for 1998 estimates the number of refugees living in Cameroon at 47,057. Of these 6,007 are being assisted by the HCR, namely:

- 3,053 Chadians;
- 1,227 Rwandans;
- 332 Burundians;
- 182 Congolese (Kinshasa);
- 230 Congolese (Brazzaville);
- 180 Sudanese;
- 167 Liberians;
- 636 other nationalities.

3. The economy

The Cameroonian economy is mainly based on the primary sector. Almost 75 per cent of the economically active population is employed in agriculture, in the broad sense of the term. Agriculture more or less enables the country to feed itself, generates about one third of hard-currency earnings and 15 per cent of government revenue, and contributes 24 per cent to GDP.

The tertiary sector employs 20 per cent of the active population, while the industrial sector is still in the embryonic stage.

Many women find employment in the informal sector.

Cameroon has experienced a decade of economic crisis aggravated by the implementation of structural adjustment plans since 1987 and by the devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994. Now, however, it has returned to the path of growth: about 5 per cent in terms of GDP in 1996/1997. Nevertheless, the effects of the recovery were still not very apparent in 1997/1998, as evidenced by the following main indicators:

- per capita income (about US$ 600);
- gross domestic product (CFAF 4,948 billion);
- inflation rate (about 2 per cent);
- external debt (CFAF 3,756 billion);
- unemployment rate (about 25 per cent of the active population).

Some 40 per cent of Camerocnians live below the poverty threshold (US$ 345 per person per year). Moreover, the rural population is particularly exposed and it is now possible to observe a certain feminization of the poverty effect.

I.2. LEGAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SYSTEM

1. The legal system

Cameroon's dual legal system (Napoleonic code plus common law) is part of its colonial legacy from the British and French mandates and trusteeships. This dualism is further complicated by the coexistence of customary and written law.

2. The political system

Cameroon acquired international sovereignty in 1960. On 1 October 1961, East (French) and West (British) Cameroon were united. Following the referendum held on 20 May 1972 Cameroon became a unitary State.

Under the Constitution of 18 January 1996, Cameroon is a democratic decentralized unitary State with a semi-presidential form of government.

There is separation of the executive, legislative and judicial powers.

A de facto single party system prevailed in Cameroon from 1966 to 1990, the year in which the Political Parties Act (Law No. 90/56 of 19 December 1990) was promulgated.

Since that change was made, five elections have been held:

- in 1992, 5 political parties participated in the presidential elections and 32 in the legislative elections;

- in January 1996, 36 political parties participated in the municipal elections. Of these 15 won seats on municipal councils and many mayors are members of opposition parties;

- in the months of May and August 1997, 44 political parties participated in the legislative elections. The present legislature includes deputies from 7 political groupings;

- in October 1997, 9 parties put forward candidates to run in the presidential elections.

The various organs of State as defined in the Constitution are as follows:

(a) Executive power

The President of the Republic is the Head of State. Elected by the whole of the nation, he is the symbol of national unity, he defines the policy of the nation, ensures respect for the Constitution and, through his arbitration, ensures the proper functioning of the public authorities. Moreover, he is the guarantor of the independence of the nation and of its territorial integrity, of the permanency and continuity of the State and of respect for international treaties and agreements (art. 5).

The President of the Republic is elected by a majority of the votes cast through direct, equal and secret universal suffrage for a term of office of 7 (seven) years and is eligible for re-election once.

The Government: the Prime Minister is the Head of Government and directs its action.

The Government implements the policy of the nation as defined by the President of the Republic (art. 11). It is appointed by the President of the Republic.

(b) Legislative power

Legislative power is exercised by the Parliament which comprises 2 (two) Houses: the National Assembly and the Senate. The Parliament legislates and monitors government action (art. 14).

The National Assembly has 180 deputies elected by direct and secret universal suffrage for a five-year term of office.

The Senate, which is not yet effectively in place, represents the regional and local authorities. It is composed of 100 members, 70 of whom are elected by indirect universal suffrage on a regional basis while the other 30 are appointed by the President of the Republic.

(c) Judicial power

Under article 37 of the Constitution, justice is administered in the territory of the Republic in the name of the people of Cameroon.

Judicial power is exercised by the Supreme Court, courts of appeal and courts. It is independent of the executive and legislative powers.

(d) The Constitutional Council

The Constitutional Council has jurisdiction in matters pertaining to the Constitution. It rules on the constitutionality of laws. It is the organ regulating the functioning of the institutions (art. 47). Pending the establishment of this body, its functions are being exercised by the Supreme Court.

(e) The Court of Impeachment

The Court of Impeachment has jurisdiction, in respect of acts committed in the exercise of their functions, to try:

- the President of the Republic, for high treason;

- the Prime Minister, members of Government and persons ranking as such and senior government officials to whom powers have been delegated, for conspiracy against the security of the State.

(f) The Economic and Social Council

There is an Economic and Social Council whose composition, duties and organization are laid down by law (art. 54).

3. The administrative system

Within this system the three main forms of administrative organization: centralization, devolution and decentralization exist side by side.

Central government consists of the various ministerial departments established and organized by presidential decree. Their number varies according to need. Under the terms of the latest decree on government organization (No. 97/205 of 7 December 1997) there are 30 ministerial departments.

Devolved government consists of the local ministerial departments in the provinces, of which there are now 10. The provinces themselves are subdivided into divisions (départements) (58) which, in their turn, are broken down into areas (arrondissements) (268) and districts (districts) (53). These administrative units are headed, respectively, by governors, prefects, sub-

prefects and district heads, each of whom exercises the same powers within his jurisdiction in all areas of activity.

As for decentralized government, article 55 of the Constitution specifies that the regional and local authorities of the Republic shall consist of "regions" and "councils". The 10 existing provinces are to become "regions", but these are not yet operational.

The regional and local authorities are legal persons of public law. They have administrative and financial autonomy in the management of regional and local interests. They are freely administered by councils elected under conditions laid down by law.

In Cameroon, technical decentralization is also practised through innumerable public institutions of an administrative, industrial or commercial nature, as well as through a whole range of quasi-public enterprises which play a part in the various sectors of the country's economic and social life.

I.3. LEGAL MACHINERY FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The Constitution of Cameroon guarantees the protection of human rights since it enshrines the basic principles which underlie the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, namely, the equality of men and women, offences and punishments to be strictly defined by law, non-retrospective effect of the law, etc. Moreover, it accords to the people of Cameroon the various fundamental freedoms (of the press, of expression, of worship, etc.).

Moreover, it is explicitly stated in the Preamble to the Constitution that the law shall ensure the right of everyone to a fair hearing in strict compliance with the rights of defence (presumption of innocence).

The criminal law applies to all. Everyone has the right of recourse to the competent national courts to seek an effective remedy against acts that violate the fundamental rights accorded to him or her by the laws in force. Thus, any victim of an act that violates his or her rights has a triple right of action:

- proceedings in the criminal courts for application of the penalties laid down for any offence;

- proceedings for damages in the civil courts;

- proceedings in the administrative courts to have an administrative act that violates a right declared invalid or set aside.

In addition to this triple right of action, which is available to everyone, there is a constitutional remedy which makes it possible to challenge the constitutionality of a law, but this is available only to the President of the Republic, the President of the National Assembly, the President of the Senate or one third of the deputies.

This range of remedies is supported by other mechanisms, in particular:

- the principle of two-tier proceedings whereby any citizen of Cameroon may bring the same case before the competent court of first instance (trial court) and then, if he or she fails to obtain satisfaction, before the court of second instance (appeal court);

- the Supreme Court, which does not decide on the facts but satisfies itself that the law has been strictly observed.

Within the legal and institutional arsenal which Cameroon has accumulated for the purpose of defending human rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women takes pride of place in view of its importance for the female population.

The legal, political and administrative measures adopted to give effect to this Convention form the subject of the next chapter, which is devoted to the procedure for the incorporation of the Convention in the domestic legal system and its place in the national institutions responsible for promoting the cause of women.

CHAPTER II

LEGAL, POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE MEASURES ADOPTED TO GIVE EFFECT TO THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

II.1. INCORPORATION OF THE CONVENTION IN THE DOMESTIC LEGAL SYSTEM

The procedure for the incorporation of international conventions in the Cameroonian legal system requires their ratification by the President of the Republic with the express authorization of the legislative power. The President ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women under Decree No. 88/993 of 15 July 1988 pursuant to Law No. 88/010 of 15 July 1988 authorizing him to do so.

1. The place of the Convention in the domestic legal system

The revised Constitution of 18 January 1996 put an end to all controversy concerning the legal force of the Preamble to the Constitution. Thus, article 65 states: "The Preamble shall be part and parcel of this Constitution. It shall have legal force." This stipulation is of primary importance insofar as the Preamble refers to the international human rights conventions in the following terms: "We, the people of Cameroon ... affirm our attachment to the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and all duly ratified international conventions relating thereto". There can be no doubt that the Convention forms part of the conventions relating to human rights, which are not simple treaty provisions within the meaning of art. 45 of the Constitution but constitutional norms in accordance with the above-mentioned art. 65.

2. Consequences of the constitutionalization of the Convention

The main result of giving the Convention the status of a set of constitutional norms is its primacy over the infra-constitutional instruments, namely laws, ordinances and regulations.

In accordance with the hierarchical principle, which requires legal norms to conform to the basic law, all previous legislation must be reviewed to eliminate any provisions that may be contrary to the spirit of the Convention.

II.2. NATIONAL MACHINERY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

In Cameroon, the question of the advancement of women is not the responsibility of the Government alone. Thus, alongside the public institutions which have been gradually built up over the last two decades, there exist numerous private organizations established as a result of the liberalization of political, cultural and economic life.

1. The public institutions for the advancement of women

Well before the ratification of the Convention, Cameroon was already taking an undeniable interest in questions relating to the advancement of women, as reflected in the establishment of appropriate government bodies.

- Thus, as early as 1975, the year of the First World Conference on Women in Mexico City, a Ministry of Social Affairs was set up. This included a service responsible for demographic action and the advancement of women attached to the Social Development Directorate.

- In 1984, on the eve of the Second World Conference on Women in Nairobi, the Ministry of Women's Affairs was established by Decree No. 84/95 of 26 March 1984.

- With the economic crisis, which became increasingly serious after 1987, Cameroon adopted a structural adjustment plan which called for a cutback in public expenditure and, among other measures, the restructuring of the Government. Thus, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Social Affairs were merged by Decree No. 88/1281 of 21 September 1988 which established the Ministry of Social and Women's Affairs (MINASCOF). This ministerial department included a Directorate for the Advancement of Women which, despite the reorganization of the Ministry under Decree No. 95/100 of 9 June 1995, retains the following functions:

  - drafting and supervising the implementation of policies, programmes and action plans relating to the advancement of women;

  - monitoring organizations for the advancement of women;

  - preparing, participating in and following up national and international meetings concerned with the advancement of women;

  - designing, developing and popularizing intermediate technologies;

  - technical relations with international organizations for the advancement of women.

- Later, the Ministry of Women's Affairs was re-established by Decree No. 97/205 of 7 December 1997 on the organization of the Government. In contrast to the spirit of the decree of February 1984, which restricted the role of the Ministry of Women's Affairs essentially to carrying out studies, the new Ministry had its powers of intervention reinforced and a general secretariat, a general inspectorate, specialized technical directorates and local departments in the provinces were placed under its authority.

(a) The ministries

The Ministry of Women's Affairs (MINCOF)

According to article 5.8 of Decree No. 97/205 of 7 December 1997 on the organization of the Government: "The Ministry of Women's Affairs is responsible for drafting and implementing measures relating to social observance of the rights of the women of Cameroon, the elimination of all discrimination against women and the strengthening of the guarantees of equality in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres.

To this end it shall:

- study and submit to the Government proposals for facilitating the employment of women in administration, agriculture, trade and industry;

- provide liaison with the national and international political organizations for the advancement of women;

- supervise the bodies providing training for women, other than the educational establishments of the Ministry of National Education."

The Ministry of Agriculture (MINAGRI), together with the Community Development Directorate and the women's agricultural activities service;

The Ministry of Public Investments and Territorial Development (MINIPAT), together with the women's activities planning service.

(b) The specialized institutions for the advancement of women

The Consultative Committee for the Advancement of Women

Established by Decree No. 84/324 of 23 May 1984 and placed under the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Committee is responsible for:

- studying questions relating to the activities and vocational training of the women of Cameroon or to their status and conditions;

- issuing opinions on draft texts concerning the economic, social and cultural advancement of women under consideration by the Ministry of Women's Affairs;

- proposing to the Ministry of Women's Affairs any action or programme designed to ensure the optimum participation of women in the development effort.

Institutions and organizations providing guidance and training for women

* Centres for the Advancement of Women

These are integrated structures of the Ministry of Women's Affairs. They provide social and vocational guidance for girls lacking an education and for women in urban and peri-urban areas.

* Protected Workshops

The Protected Workshops, which are managed by the Ministry of Social Affairs, are specialized retraining and reintegration establishments for young women who are socially maladjusted, at moral risk or from needy families. An example is the Yaoundé Dressmaking Workshop for Disabled Women (BOBINE D'OR).

The purpose of this Ministry-run workshop is to provide disabled women with vocational training as dressmakers and an appropriate social education with a view to their socio-economic integration. It helps to find work and accommodation for its trainees when they have completed their training.

* Appropriate Technology Centres

Their role is:

- to provide training, further training, retraining and specialist training for women in agro-pastoral, domestic and craft work;

- to promote research in the agro-pastoral, domestic and craft fields with a view to making women's work less long and arduous;

- to identify, develop and popularize appropriate technologies for the benefit of women and make them easier to acquire, with a view to increasing agro-pastoral and craft output;

- to improve methods of preserving and processing various crops, with a view to reducing post-harvest losses.

Only the centre in Maroua is operational.

There are other State bodies active in the appropriate technology field, such as:

- the National Centre for Research and Experimentation in Agricultural Mechanization (CENNEMA);

- the National Technology Development Committee (CNDI);

- the Institute of Agronomic Research for Development (IRAD).

* Home-Workshops

This is a specialized institution of the Ministry of Social Affairs that provides supervision for socially maladjusted young women through training and apprenticeships.

2. Private organizations for the advancement of women

(a) The women's branches of the political parties

Within most of the parties which dominate political life in Cameroon there are organs for the advancement of women.

(b) NGOs and women's associations

The association movement in Cameroon is governed by the Freedom of Association Act (Law No. 90/53 of 19 December 1990).

About 150 national associations and NGOs are registered with the Ministry of Women's Affairs. They can be broken down as follows:

- economic development associations and NGOs: 70 per cent
- women's rights associations and NGOs: 16 per cent
- socio-cultural associations and NGOs: 7 per cent
- associations and NGOs concerned with health: 5 per cent
- associations and NGOs concerned with training: 2 per cent

The activities of all these associations and NGOs are directed towards improving the living conditions and status of women.

(c) Cooperatives

Under the Cooperative Societies and Joint Initiative Groups (COOP-GIC) Act (Law No. 92/006 of 14 August 1992) and the Economic Interest Groupings (GIE) Act (Law No. 93/015 of 22 December 1993), other types of groupings, mostly economic in nature, are being developed.

PART TWO

SPECIFIC INFORMATION ON EACH PROVISION OF THE CONVENTION

CHAPTER I

CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

(Articles 1-3)

I.1. EMBODIMENT OF THE PRINCIPLE OF THE EQUALITY OF MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CONSTITUTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION OF CAMEROON

The principle of the equality of men and women forms part of the corpus of Cameroonian law. This applies to:

1. The Constitution: Cameroon's constitutions have always enshrined the principle of gender equality. In this respect, the Preamble of the Constitution of 18 January 1996 is quite explicit:

"We, the people of Cameroon, declare that:

- the human person, without distinction as to race, religion, sex or belief, possesses inalienable and sacred rights;

- all shall have equal rights and obligations;

- the State shall provide all its citizens with the conditions necessary for their development;

- the State shall guarantee all citizens of either sex the rights and freedoms set forth in the Preamble to the Constitution."

2. The Criminal Code: under art. 1 of the Code, "the criminal law shall apply to all".

3. The Labour Code: art. 2(1) states that "the right of every citizen to work is recognized as a fundamental right. The State shall do its utmost to help the citizen find a job and keep it once it has been obtained".

4. The electoral laws: these deal with the capacity to vote and the conditions of eligibility for election. Thus, any Cameroonian national or naturalized Cameroonian, without distinction as to sex, may vote in elections, provided he or she has completed his or her twentieth (20th) year and is not disqualified by law.

Moreover, any Cameroonian citizen, without distinction as to sex, may be enrolled on a list of candidates for election to the National Assembly, provided he or she has the right to vote, is duly enrolled on an electoral list, has completed his or her twenty-third (23rd) year on polling day and can read and write French or English.

What is more, art. 3(2) of the Municipal Elections Act includes the fair representation of women among the essential criteria to be applied in compiling electoral lists.

5. The Civil Service Regulations

According to arts. 12 and 13, access to the Civil Service is open, without discrimination, to anyone of Cameroonian nationality who satisfies the age conditions, i.e. who is not under 17 or over 30 for officials of categories C and D, or over 35 for officials of categories A and B, subject to the fulfilment of certain physical fitness and character requirements.

Despite the existence of laws and regulations on the equality of men and women with respect to the enjoyment of certain rights, there is, strictly speaking, no proper legal definition of discrimination.

I.2. LACK OF A LEGAL DEFINITION OF DISCRIMINATION

Although Cameroon has adopted the principles set out in the international conventions relating to human rights in general and the equality of men and women and non-discrimination with respect to women in particular, the definition of discrimination given in art. 1 of the Convention is not explicitly reproduced in any Cameroonian text. The references to discrimination in the legislation are based on race, religion and sex.

The embodiment of the principle of equality is not in itself sufficient to change behaviour and mentalities that have become entrenched over centuries of respect for tradition, particularly when allowance is made for the coexistence of written and customary law within the Cameroonian legal system. The lack of a legal definition of discrimination and corresponding sanctions accounts, in part, for the survival of such discrimination within the family and in society at large.

I.3. EXISTENCE OF PROVISIONS AND PRACTICES THAT DISCRIMINATE AGAINST WOMEN

Despite texts which lay down principles of gender equality, there are certain areas in which the legal status of women displays weaknesses:

1. Written law

(a) Discrimination as regards women's right to work. The right and freedom to engage in an economic activity are limited by:

- Article 223 of the Civil Code and article 74 of Ordinance 81/02 of 29 June 1981 concerning the powers of the husband to object to his wife's pursuit of a separate trade or profession;

- Article 7 of the Commercial Code which authorizes the husband to put an end to his wife's economic activity simply by notifying his objection to the Registrar of the Commercial Court.

(b) Discrimination with respect to the right to settle in any place. This right is reserved exclusively for the husband who, as head of the family, decides where the family home shall be.

(c) Discrimination with respect to the exercise and enjoyment of the right of ownership.

Under the Constitution, ownership means the right guaranteed to everyone by law to use, enjoy and dispose of property. However, under arts. 1421 and 1428 of the Civil Code concerning the administration of assets forming part of the marital community property and art. 559 of the Commercial Code on bankruptcy a married woman does not have complete enjoyment of that right.

(d) Administration of assets forming part of the community property

This is entrusted to the husband who may sell, transfer or mortgage community property without the consent of his wife (art. 1421 of the Civil Code).

> "The husband shall administer all the personal property of his wife. He may independently exercise any right of action to recover movable property or to protect or recover possession vested in the wife. He shall be responsible for any physical depreciation of his wife's personal property due to failure to take protective action" (art. 1128 of the Civil Code).

(e) Bankruptcy of a trader husband

Although the provisions of arts. 557 and 558 of the Commercial Code protect the married woman in the event of the bankruptcy of her trader husband, art. 559 of the Code restricts the free enjoyment of the assets by the wife of the bankrupt.

Article 557: "If the husband goes bankrupt, the wife, whose contributions of immovables do not form part of the community property, shall take back the said immovables in kind, together with those which she may have received by succession, by gift between living persons or under a will."

Article 558: "The wife shall likewise take back the immovables purchased by her or in her name out of funds derived from the aforesaid legacies or gifts, provided that their use is expressly stated in the purchase agreement and the origin of the funds is confirmed by a statement of accounts or any other authenticated instrument."

Article 559, on the other hand, is discriminatory insofar as it provides that: "Whatever the regime under which the marriage contract was drawn up, apart from the case envisaged in art. 558 above, the legal presumption shall be that the property acquired by the wife of the bankrupt belongs to her husband, has been paid for with his money and must be pooled with the main body of his assets, unless the wife can show otherwise".

/...

(f) Discrimination with respect to equality of rights

- The exercise of guardianship in the event of deprivation of legal capacity

It follows from art. 506 of the Civil Code that in the event of the wife being deprived of legal capacity the husband automatically becomes her guardian. Article 507 of the Civil Code, on the other hand, discriminates against the married woman since it clearly states that: "The wife may be appointed guardian of her husband. In this case, the family council shall decide the form and conditions of administration, subject to an appeal to the courts by a wife who believes herself to have been wronged by the family's decision".

- The definition and punishment of the offence of adultery

Where the criminal law is concerned, art. 361 of the Cameroonian Criminal Code punishes adultery differently according to the sex of the offender. Thus, a wife's adultery is punishable as soon as it is found that she has had sexual relations with a man other than her husband, no matter how frequently and no matter where. The husband, on the other hand, is liable to be punished only if he has had sexual relations with women other than his wife or wives in the matrimonial home or if he has habitually had such relations outside the matrimonial home.

By imposing these conditions with regard to the punishment of the offence of male adultery, the law makes it difficult to prove adultery by the husband, who is thereby afforded special protection.

On the other hand, adultery by either of the spouses is a violation of the duty of fidelity which may be cited indiscriminately by the husband or wife as an absolute ground for divorce (arts. 229 and 230 of the Civil Code).

It follows from the above provisions that the wife is, in some respects, a person lacking in legal capacity who must be protected by her husband and, indeed, the wife's state of inferiority is further accentuated by customary practices and de facto discrimination.

2. Customary practices

The statistics reveal discrimination associated with practices that are rooted in custom and tradition.

Thus, the figures on the percentage of women in the Government reveal the following trend:

- In 1984, there were 5 women out of 43 members of the Government, or 11.6 per cent;

- In 1997, there were 3 women out of 45, or 6.6 per cent.

Similarly, in the central administration the percentage of women holding responsible positions is less than 20 per cent. It is also worth noting that

women's careers progress more slowly and there are no women holding high office (Governor, Prefect, Sub-Prefect or District Head).

Many customary practices have unfavourable consequences for women:

- early and forced marriages;
- obstacles to the exercise of traditional authority by women;
- sexual abuse;
- female genital mutilation;
- abusive widowhood rites;
- food taboos and prohibitions;
- the subjection of women in matters of reproductive health;
- physical violence and mental cruelty;
- obstacles to succession;
- levirate, a practice which is dying out.

3. De facto discrimination

There are certain forms of discrimination against women that find expression in:

- difficulties in obtaining access to credit;
- the reluctance of some enterprises to recruit women because of the maternity question or the nature of the work;
- the precedence given to male children in the field of education.

In the face of this situation experienced by women in connection with the enjoyment of certain fundamental rights, the authorities, supported by various NGOs, are calling upon all the social partners to change their attitude and have taken a series of measures to ensure that women can develop their potential to the full.

I.4. POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC MEASURES TO ENSURE THE FULL DEVELOPMENT AND ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Aware of the existence of the above-mentioned discriminatory customs and practices and the need for an institutional framework for the advancement of women, the authorities have taken a series of appropriate measures.

1. Ministry of Women's Affairs

The Ministry of Women's Affairs (MINCOF) was established, with specific functions, by the Government Organization Act (Decree No. 97/205 of 7 December 1997).

The Ministry of Women's Affairs plays a watchdog role and performs the following functions:

- the institutionalization of International Women's Day on which public opinion is made aware of the problems of women. Thus, in 1998, the chosen theme for the celebration of International Women's Day in Cameroon was "Practices and customs that discriminate against women".

  The discussion of this subject led to:

  - the listing of the various customs and practices that discriminate against women;

  - the noting of the adverse consequences of these practices for women, the family and society as a whole;

  - the drafting of specific proposals with a view to the eventual elimination of these customs and practices.

- informing women of their rights by distributing rights brochures;

- the establishment of focal points in certain ministerial departments;

- the establishment of institutions for the guidance and training of women, such as:

  - centres for the advancement of women;

  - appropriate technology centres;

  - social centres;

  - home-workshops;

  - protected workshops;

  - leadership pools;

  - dressmaking workshop for disabled women.

- the establishment of the Committee of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians (CFEMP);

- the launching of projects such as:

/...

- the advancement of women in the Civil Service;

- the drafting of a programme of guidance and advice for girls and women in Africa (under the aegis of UNESCO/ISESCO and the Ministry of National Education (MINEDUC)).

- contributing to projects and programmes concerning women initiated by other ministerial departments, such as:

  - the financing programme for agricultural and community microprojects (FIMAC);

  - the national agricultural extension services programme (PNVA);

  - the Central Rural Reform Unit (CUROR);

  - the Fund for the Support of Rural Organizations (FONDAOR).

- with the Ministry of Public Investments and Territorial Development:

  - the project to reduce poverty and promote the advancement of women. The corresponding loan agreement was signed with the African Development Bank in February 1998.

- with the Ministry of Public Health:

  - the nutrition education programme.

- with the Ministry of National Education:

  - the girls' non-formal education project in collaboration with UNICEF.

- material support for women's groups;

- financial support for women in distress;

- the granting of loans to women under bilateral and multilateral cooperation projects such as:

  - Productive Microprojects for the Benefit of Women in Cameroon (MPPF-CAM/CIDA);

  - Women, Population and Development (UNFPA).

- the development of association activities.

These efforts by the Ministry of Women's Affairs have already led to abolition of the requirement that married women obtain marital authorization to travel and to the payment of the housing allowance to married women.

2. Consultative Committee for the Advancement of Women

Since it was established, the Committee has held only three ordinary meetings, the repeated restructuring of the supervisory Ministry having resulted in its operations being placed on the back burner. A study is currently being conducted with a view to its revitalization.

Associations and NGOs, whose activities are encouraged by the State, work alongside these public institutions for the advancement of women.

There are groups of these associations active in different fields, for example:

(a) In economic development:

- ACAFIA (Cameroonian Association of Women Agricultural Engineers);
- AID-CAMEROUN (Support for Development Initiatives);
- CIFEDI (Committee for the Integration of Women in Industrial Development);

(b) In the protection of women's rights:

- ACAFEJ (Cameroonian Association of Women Lawyers);
- ALVF (Association to Combat Violence against Women);
- COCADEF (Cameroonian Committee for Women's Rights);

(c) In women's health:

- CAMNAFAW (Cameroonian National Association for Family Welfare);
- FESADE (Women-Health-Development);
- ACAFEM (Cameroonian Association of Women Doctors);

(d) In training:

- CERFEPROD (Women's Group for the Promotion of Development);

(e) In socio-cultural development:

- FOCARFE (Cameroonian Women's Foundation for Rational Environmental Action);

(f) In promoting peace:

- FAWECAM (Forum of African Women Educationalists/Cameroon);

(g) In advocacy:

- the Women's Caucus;

- LEFE (League for the Education of Women and Children).

With regard to legislative measures taken to ensure the full development and advancement of women, it should be noted that since Cameroon ratified the Convention no legislation has been adopted with a view to its implementation.

At the same time, although some of the above-mentioned discriminatory provisions remain in force, it is nonetheless true that the establishment of a national commission to revise the laws and regulations reflects the Government's concern to have them repealed.

With a view to regulating the operation of the public institutions, the authorities have set up judicial machinery to protect the rights of women.

I.5. JUDICIAL MACHINERY FOR THE PROTECTION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Cameroon is a State governed by the rule of law. The Constitution provides for judicial machinery to protect human rights. Thus, every Cameroonian citizen has the right to a fair hearing before the courts. Justice is administered by the courts of first instance, appeal courts and the Supreme Court, in strict compliance with the rights of defence.

Any woman victim of an act of discrimination has the right to refer the case to the civil, criminal or administrative courts of the first and second instance and even to bring it before the Supreme Court.

There are legal remedies for discrimination, but the lack of a legal definition of discrimination and its too general characterization in the Criminal Code mean that acts of discrimination cannot always be identified as such. This would appear to be the reason why there is so little jurisprudence.

In some areas, however, there are established precedents. The Supreme Court has always affirmed the principle of gender equality with respect to the right to inherit on intestacy. In matters of divorce, where the spouses have not previously determined the fate of their property under a marriage settlement, they are subjected to the regime of community of movables and property acquired during marriage laid down in the Civil Code.

Similarly, there are no specific national agencies or ombudsmen responsible for watching over the application of the Convention. However, the new organization chart of the Ministry of Women's Affairs provides for a women's rights monitoring unit.

CHAPTER II

TEMPORARY SPECIAL MEASURES AIMED AT ACCELERATING DE FACTO EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

(Article 4)

The Constitution of 18 January 1996 guarantees compulsory primary education. This reflects the political will to provide access to education for all, without discrimination.

Even though discrimination is nowhere precisely defined, Cameroon has taken a number of specific measures to accelerate equality between men and women. These measures relate to three particular areas: education, health and employment.

II.1. EDUCATION

The authorities have taken measures relating to both formal and non-formal education.

1. State of formal education

In Cameroon, the right of access to education applies equally to boys and girls. However, the proportion of girls among the children attending school is low and there are subsequent disparities associated with socio-cultural attitudes and practices stemming from the hostile environment in which the girls have to live.

In general, the enrolment rate is declining: from 78 per cent in 1984 to 61 per cent in 1995.

- At the primary education level, girls account for less than half the total, or barely 46 per cent. The percentage varies from province to province and between the two educational systems (French-speaking and English-speaking), which are not harmonized.

- At the secondary education level, girls make up less than 42 per cent of the total.

2. Non-formal education

To encourage the education of girls and women no longer of the required age for first enrolment in the formal system, the Government has provided certain alternative schemes run by several different ministries:

- the Ministry of Youth and Sports with its youth and recreation and functional literacy centres;

- the Ministry of Social Affairs with its social centres and specialized institutions;

- the Ministry of Women's Affairs with, for example, its Centres for the Advancement of Women;

- the Ministry of National Education with its SAR-SM (Craft and Rural Sections-Domestic Sections);

- the Ministry of Employment, Labour and Social Insurance with its vocational training centres;

- the Ministry of Agriculture with its rural advisory services;

- the Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries with its zootechnical and veterinary training centres.

In addition to these public non-formal education initiatives, there are others undertaken by denominational and lay organizations.

3. Special educational measures

- Circular Letter No. 10/A/562/MINEDUC/ESG of 10 January 1980 concerning the readmission of a pupil suspended in connection with a case of pregnancy;

- launch of the national functional literacy programme in 1988;

- commemoration of Literacy Day since 1992;

- preparation and implementation of programmes specially designed for women in both national languages (META languages in the North-West, the TOUROU project in the Far North, experience with the NUPI programme) and official languages (experience of the International Linguistics Society);

- assumption of the Vice-Presidency of the UNESCO National Commission by the Ministry of Women's Affairs;

- presence of Cameroon at various international meetings: conferences of African Ministers of Education at Addis Ababa in 1961 and Nairobi in 1968, Lagos Action Plan (1986), Caracas (1988), Ouagadougou (1993), Copenhagen (1995).

Similarly, following the world conference on education for all (1990), in 1991 Cameroon adopted a declaration of general education policy whose essential aim is to meet the educational needs of all the target populations by the year 2000.

The resulting framework of action includes specific objectives in the field of women's education, namely:

- strengthening the public non-formal education structures;

- reducing regional educational disparities taking sex and age into account.

Likewise, the national action plan for children assigns the following objectives to be achieved by the year 2000:

- improved access to basic education for all;
- reduced disparities, with special emphasis on the most deprived regions;
- priority to be given to enrolling girls and keeping them in school.

It was on this basis that the Cameroonian Education Forum (1995) recommended, among other things, access to education for disadvantaged groups. This led to the adoption of a declaration on the new education policy (1996) which reaffirmed the political will of the Government to:

- combat educational exclusion;
- reduce regional inequalities;
- remove obstacles to the education of girls.

Finally, the new law on educational guidance is strengthening the compulsory aspect of primary education and facilitating non-discriminatory access to education for all.

These temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women also concern the field of health.

II.2. HEALTH

Clearly, in the absence of special measures in the field of health the degree of development cannot be properly assessed. In most cases women do not have easy access to health care. Despite the efforts of the authorities to promote the health of all social groups, women, because of their adverse circumstances, experience difficulty in obtaining access to health care facilities.

Nevertheless, there are measures which protect women's interests in the health field. For example,

- Law No. 90/062 of 19 December 1990 granting a special exemption for health care units. It is a feature of this law that the income from the services provided must be devoted, on a priority basis, to the operation of the health facilities. This measure enables women, the main target group, to benefit from these services more cheaply;
- the Labour Code Act (Law No. 92/007 of 14 August 1992). Articles 84 and 85 of the Act read as follows:

Article 84

"(1) Any pregnant woman whose condition has been medically confirmed may terminate her contract without notice and without having to pay any compensation as a result. During this period, the employer may not terminate the contract of employment of the woman concerned on grounds of pregnancy.

(2) Every pregnant woman has the right to fourteen (14) weeks of maternity leave beginning four (4) weeks before the expected date of confinement. This leave may be extended by six (6) weeks in the event of illness, duly confirmed, resulting from either pregnancy or childbirth. At no time during this period of leave may the employer terminate the employment contract of the woman concerned.

(3) When confinement takes place before the expected date, the rest period shall be extended to make up the fourteen (14) weeks of leave to which the employee is entitled.

(4) When confinement takes place after the expected date, the pre-confinement leave shall be extended to the date of confinement without the post-confinement leave being reduced."

Article 85

"(1) During a period of fifteen (15) months following the birth of the child, the motner shall have the right to rest breaks for nursing purposes.

(2) The total duration of these rest breaks may not exceed one (1) hour per working day.

(3) During this period, the mother may terminate her contract without notice under the conditions laid down in Art. 84(1) above."

- Law No. 96/03 of 4 January 1996 establishing a framework law in the field of health relating to the protection and advancement of vulnerable groups, particularly women and children;

- free pre-natal monitoring in mother and child protection centres and free examination of infants;

- training for women in health problems to enable them to promote health in their families and the community.

II.3. EMPLOYMENT

The terms of the Labour Code, which offers broad protection for women and children, exclude discrimination in this field. In practice, some employers refuse to recruit women for certain jobs because of the maternity question.

The Labour Code makes no provision for the care of babies whose mother dies in childbirth.

On the other hand, it regulates the daytime and night working hours for women.

Article 80 fixes the length of the working week at 40 hours.

Article 82 deals with night work. Thus, women and children must have at least 12 consecutive hours of rest. Similarly, women may not be employed to do night work in industry.

The law lays down penalties for non-compliance with these regulations to protect women.

II.4. PENALTIES FOR NON-COMPLIANCE

These penalties relate to the fields of education, health and employment.

1. Education

If discrimination is found, the victim can assert her rights by appealing to higher administrative authority or to the courts.

Another difficulty is the effective application of the regulations in force.

2. Health

Article 338 of the Criminal Code protects pregnant women who are victims of violence. Thus, "anyone who by using violence against a pregnant woman or a child in the process of being born causes, even unintentionally, the death or permanent disablement of the child shall be liable to imprisonment for five to ten years and a fine of 100,000 to 2,000,000 francs".

Strictly speaking, there are no sanctions against sexual mutilation. However, it can be treated as an assault causing bodily harm punishable under the Criminal Code.

3. Employment

The rights of the worker of either sex are guaranteed by the Labour Code. Thus, in cases of unfair dismissal, the victim is entitled to compensation for the injury suffered. This leads to pecuniary and civil penalties. The dismissal of a pregnant woman constitutes aggravating circumstances.

Nevertheless, it seems that women, despite the existence of protective legislation, are still the subject of gender-related social prejudice and discrimination.

CHAPTER III

STEREOTYPED ROLES FOR MEN AND WOMEN

(Article 5)

The roles of men and women vary with the type of society though, fundamentally, the man continues to be perceived as the head of the family. In many cases, especially in rural areas, this is one of the most tenacious stereotypes, although in the cities under the influence of various factors it is tending to fade.

Despite this trend and the laws in force, the women of Cameroon continue to be subjected to numerous forms of discrimination in the political, economic, legal, social and cultural fields. Below, we identify some of these forms of discrimination and examine the strategies adopted by the authorities to lessen their adverse effects.

III 1. IDENTIFICATION OF CERTAIN PRACTICES AND CUSTOMS THAT DISCRIMINATE AGAINST WOMEN

- Forced and early marriages;
- limited access to productive resources;
- female genital mutilation;
- limited freedom of expression;
- restricted role in the community;
- inferior status relative to men;
- exclusion of women from certain religious responsibilities;
- domestic and other violence;
- harassment and sexual abuse;
- food taboos and prohibitions;
- abusive widowhood rites;
- subjection of women in the field of reproductive health;
- principle of stereotyped socialization;
- exclusion of women from certain high offices of State (Governor, Prefect, Sub-Prefect, District Head).

Strategies have been adopted with a view to mitigating the ill effects of this discrimination.

III.2. ACTION STRATEGIES

The various strategies are listed below, followed by the principal actors.

1. The strategies

These strategies, which feature in the Declaration of Policy for the Integration of Women in Development (PANIFD), include:

- promoting and installing machinery to ensure the full development of women's potential;
- eliminating the cultural taboos that are holding back the development of young women through awareness-raising and education;
- improving women's awareness of family planning and popularizing education in responsible parenthood;
- providing drinking water supplies for rural communities;
- promoting the rights of women;
- promoting direct intervention on behalf of women victims of violence;
- adopting measures to encourage the integration or reintegration of poor and marginalized women into the economically active population.

2. The actors

The principal actors involved in implementing these strategies are:

- the authorities;
- the NGOs and various associations;
- the religious communities;
- the media.

CHAPTER IV

SUPPRESSION OF EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN

(Article 6)

IV.1. EXTENT OF PROSTITUTION

Prostitution is a social scourge which is rife in both urban and rural areas, being practised by both men and women. This scourge is now so widespread that it has become difficult to identify and count the prostitutes.

Before the economic crisis, there was a strategy for identifying and recording prostitutes so that they could be given medical attention.

Prostitution affects both old and young. Its causes include:

- poverty;
- the economic crisis and its consequences (unemployment, redundancy);
- moral decline;
- early and forced marriages;
- the weakening of family ties;
- domestic violence.

Faced with the scourge of prostitution, the authorities have adopted a range of measures.

IV.2. RANGE OF MEASURES

Some of these measures are preventive, others punitive.

1. Preventive measures

There are programmes for rehabilitating girls who are at moral risk or socially maladjusted. These programmes are run by the Ministries of Women's Affairs and Social Affairs through the appropriate institutions such as centres for the advancement of women, social centres and home-workshops.

Awareness campaigns are organized from time to time. They are aimed at all the prime targets, in this case adolescents, police officers, armed forces personnel, the prostitutes, students, etc. The actions of the authorities are supported by NGOs. Thus, travelling theatre performances, concerts and pairing in red-light districts are organized to make all those concerned aware of the pernicious effects of this phenomenon.

The programmes run by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the youth movements are designed to provide sex education for the young.

Some youth centres also engage in information, education and communication (IEC) activities.

There is no sex tourism in Cameroon. Nevertheless, a new law to regulate tourist activity has just been passed by the National Assembly since such activity could in itself encourage trafficking in women. Thus, article 5 of Law No. 98/006 of 14 April 1998 stipulates that: "The Government shall ensure compliance with the tourism charter and the tourism code of the World Tourism Organization inviting States and individuals to prevent any possibility of tourism being used for the purpose of exploiting others. In this respect, appropriate measures should be taken to combat sex tourism involving children".

2. Punitive measures

In Cameroon, the Criminal Code identifies prostitution, procuring and the corruption of minors as punishable offences.

(a) Prostitution: art. 343

"(1) Anyone of either sex who habitually engages in sexual acts with others, for remuneration, shall be liable to imprisonment for six months to five years and a fine of 20,000 to 500,000 francs [...]

(2) Anyone who, with a view to prostitution or sexual immorality, proceeds publicly by gestures, words, written messages or any other means to solicit persons of either sex shall be liable to the same penalties."

(b) Procuring: art. 294

"(1) Anyone who incites, aids or facilitates the prostitution of others or shares, even occasionally, in the proceeds of the prostitution of others or receives subsidies from a person engaged in prostitution shall be liable to imprisonment for six months to five years and a fine of 20,000 to 1,000,000 francs.

(2) Anyone who, while living with a person engaged in prostitution, is unable to provide evidence of resources sufficient to enable him to support himself unaided shall be presumed to be receiving subsidies.

(3) The penalties shall be doubled if:

(a) the offence is accompanied by coercion or fraud or if the perpetrator is armed or if he is the owner, manager or person placed in charge of an establishment in which prostitution is practised;

(b) if the offence has been committed at the expense of a person under twenty-one years of age;

(c) if the perpetrator is the father or mother, guardian or person customarily responsible.

(4) In the cases mentioned under subparagraph (3) above, the application of the provisions of art. 48 shall be mandatory. Thus, it follows that in the event of a minor of 18 years of age having committed acts characterized as an offence, the President of the Court may impose on the father, mother, guardian or person customarily responsible the obligation provided for in art. 46 in the event of the minor committing acts of the same nature within a period of one year unless the obligee provides evidence that he has taken all the necessary measures to prevent the minor from committing such offence.

(5) The court may order forfeiture of rights and deprive the person convicted for the same period of any right of guardianship or supervision; it may also prohibit him, for the same period, from having the physical custody, even when customary, of any person under the age of twenty-one.

(6) In the circumstances specified in subparagraph 3(a), the court may also order that the establishment be closed, even though it be assigned to some other use.

(7) For the purposes of the application of this article, the prostitute shall not be considered to be an accomplice."

(c) Corruption of minors: art. 344

"(1) Anyone who incites, encourages or facilitates sexual immorality or the corruption of a person under twenty-one years of age shall be liable to imprisonment for one to five years and a fine of 20,000 to 1,000,000 francs.

(2) The penalties shall be doubled if the victim is under the age of sixteen.

(3) In addition, the court may order forfeiture of rights and deprive the convicted person for the same period of parental authority and any right of guardianship or supervision."

Finally, as regards prostitution practised under the cover of matrimonial agencies, it should be noted that officially there are none. However, individuals or groups do enter into correspondence with foreign matrimonial agencies. This phenomenon, which is tending to become more widespread, is causing the authorities concern.

CHAPTER V

WOMEN IN POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE

(Article 7)

In Cameroon, there are no laws that discriminate against women in political life. The Constitution, which is the supreme norm, guarantees the equality of all before the law without distinction as to sex, race or religion.

The various electoral laws (municipal, legislative and presidential) recognize the freedom and the equal right of men and women to vote in elections and/or to be eligible for election.

Similarly, there are no laws that discriminate against women as far as appointment to high office or participation in national and international activities are concerned.

However, despite these political good intentions, women continue to be under-represented in decision-making circles.

This is mainly due to prejudices and stereotypes, economic factors and the failure effectively to apply the laws and regulations in force.

V.1. WOMEN AND POLITICS

Cameroon has positive laws and plentiful female human resources at its disposal, but the latter are inadequately represented in various public institutions.

1. The National Assembly

There are two houses of parliament: the National Assembly and the Senate. The latter chamber, one of the innovations of the Constitution of 18 January 1996, has still to be installed.

Under the separation of powers principle, the legislative branch collaborates with the executive branch and supervises its action.

Table 1. Percentage of women in the National Assembly since 1960

Year	Number of members	Number of women	Percentage	Remarks
1960-1965	137	1	0.8	Assembly of Federated States
	50	2	4	Federal Assembly
1966-1970	141	2	1.4	Assembly of Federated States
	50	2	4	Federal Assembly
1970-1973	137	5	3.6	Assembly of Federated States
	50	2	4	Federal Assembly
1973-1978	120	7	5.8	Single chamber One-party
1978-1983	120	12	10	Single chamber One-party
1983-1988	120	17	14.2	Single chamber One-party
1988-1992	180	26	14.5	Single chamber One-party
1992-1997	180	23	12.8	Single chamber Multi-party
1997	180	10	5.5	National Assembly

Source: Cameroon Tribune, No. 6644 of 21 July 1998.

This table shows that since 1992 the percentage of women in the multi-party Assembly has fallen sharply. This is due, in particular, to the small numbers of women being nominated, starting with the preliminaries. Moreover, some political parties will not put women at the head of their lists. In 1992, out of 49 lists submitted by the RDPC, only 4 were headed by women. Out of the 46 lists submitted by the UNDP, 2 were headed by women. The MDR and the UPC had no women at the head of their lists

Between 1960 and 1992, women held only one important post in the executive office of the National Assembly, that of secretary.

In 1992, there were two women in the executive office: one (1) quester and one (1) secretary.

In 1997, for the first time, women occupied the following posts:

- 2 posts of secretary in the office of the National Assembly;
- 1 post of committee chairman;
- 1 post of vice-chairman of a parliamentary group;

- 1 woman among the 13 members of the Chairmen's Conference which takes important parliamentary decisions.

2. The Economic and Social Council

The Economic and Social Council is one of the country's constitutional political institutions. The number of women members is negligible.

3. The Government

- 1984: 5 women in the Government (2 ministers and 3 deputy ministers) as compared with 43 men, or 11.6 per cent of women;

- 1992: 2 women members of a Government consisting of 44 ministers, i.e. 4.5 per cent;

- 1997: 3 women ministers out of 45, or 6.6 per cent.

4. Women and local government

Women have difficulty in obtaining access to elective office because of the nominations procedures which are stacked against them.

- In 1987, women accounted for 9.19 per cent of total nominations and 8 per cent of those elected;

- In 1996, the figures were 13.69 per cent of nominations and 10.68 per cent of those elected.

With regard to the participation of women in town councils, the following trends have been observed:

Table 2. Participation of women in town councils

Year	Total number of town councillors	Proportion of women		Number of women mayors
		Total	Per cent	
1982	5 107	336	6.6	0
1987	5 345	446	8.3	1
1996	9 932	1 061	10.7	2

Source: Table based on MINAT data.

It should be noted that no woman has yet occupied the post of government delegate. In 1992, a woman was elected mayor for the first time following the resignation of the incumbent.

Despite the political will to guarantee equal opportunity of access to elective and administrative posts, there is still discrimination against women even in the political parties, where they mainly serve as grassroots activists.

5. Women and the political parties

The activities of the political parties and associations are based on the laws that regulate them. Every citizen, without distinction as to sex, is free to set up a political party.

Out of the approximately 130 political parties active in Cameroon, only one was set up by a woman. However, three parties are headed by women.

V.2. WOMEN IN ADMINISTRATION

The number of women occupying strategic posts in the civil service, the private sector and quasi-public enterprises falls well below the quota of 30 per cent determined by mutual agreement at the World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995.

Out of 150,643 civil servants, 46,110 or 30.6 per cent are women. They are divided up among the various categories as follows:

Table 3. Distribution of women in the civil service, by category

Category	Total number	Number of women	Percentage
A2	13 770	2 909	21.12
A1	11 943	2 135	17.87
B2	3 048	401	13.15
B1	22 414	5 991	26.72
C	23 324	8 199	35.15
D	11 103	4 903	44.15
I2	22	1	4.28
I1	222	68	30.63
I0	2 899	891	30.73

Source: Public Service Record, September 1997.

Table 4. Distribution of women in the public services, by profession

Profession	Total number	Number of women	Percentage
Administration, general	4 158	991	23.83
Administration, school and university	45	4	8.8
Administration, public health	45	2	0.8
Social affairs	542	202	37.27
Agriculture	5 162	526	10.19
Aeronautics	69	6	8.69
Accountancy	509	81	15.9
Surveying	995	54	5.12
Diplomacy	154	21	13.63
Demography	29	2	6.87
Documentation	220	70	31.81
Customs	1 378	146	10.59
Education, general	29 582	9 936	33.58
Education, technical	3 922	1 541	39.29
Education, higher	913	115	11.58
Education, physical	2 503	452	18.05
Postal and telecommunication services	86	10	12.5
Forestry and water resources	1 158	163	14.07
Livestock and fisheries	746	6	8.44
Registry	1 370	421	30.73
Civil engineering	1 030	19	1.84
Nursing	8 381	4 017	47.93
Animal industries	33	5	15.15
Information technology	474	87	18.35
Government publications office	7	2	28.57
Youth and sports	13	3	23.07
Youth and recreation	441	96	21.76
Medicine	767	164	21.38
Mining and geology	88	4	4.54
Meteorology	101	17	16.88
Prices, weights and measures	86	11	12.71
Inland Revenue	511	65	10.20
Treasury	1 069	278	20.60

Profession	Total number	Number of women	Percentage
Registration, stamps and administration	262	90	53.32
Statistics	502	35	6.97
Geographical services	16	1	6.25
Employment and social security	416	79	18.99
Translation, interpretation	174	27	15.51
Sanitary engineering	75	24	28.23
Medical technology	981	307	31.29
Telecommunication technology	129	17	13.17
Industrial technology	8	169	4.73

Source: Civil Service Record, 17 January 1995.

These figures reveal the following:

- women are represented in every branch of the public services;
- however, women are heavily concentrated in the lower echelons of the professions and the civil service hierarchy;
- in some professions there are very few women.

Table 5. Number of women occupying managerial posts in ministries

Post	Total number	Number of women	Percentage
Secretary General	25	2	8
Inspector General	34	4	11.8
Technical Adviser	40	4	10
Director	138	12	0.6
Deputy Director	94	10	10.6
Assistant Director	326	43	13.19
Head of Service	1 041	181	17.38

Source: Survey made by ISMP in December 1996.

In the quasi-public enterprises and the private sector, there are two women managers. Because they have difficulty in obtaining access to credit, women become trapped in small-scale trading activities.

V.3. WOMEN AND THE LEGAL PROFESSION

Cameroon has considerable potential in terms of women in the legal profession.

Table 6. Distribution of women in the legal profession

Category	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
Judge	474	95	569	16.7
Barrister	403	95	498	19
Bailiff	111	7	118	5.9
Notary	31	19	50	38

Source: Data collected by MINJUSTICE, August 1998.

V.4. WOMEN AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Women's organizations and associations have grown and diversified under the protection of the Freedom of Association Act of 1990, the Cooperative Societies Act of 1992 and the Economic Interest Groupings Act of 1993. About 150 women's NGOs are registered with the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

CHAPTER VI

WOMEN AND INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATION

(Article 8)

The women of Cameroon can represent their country on an equal footing with men.

In reality, however, as the following figures show, women are under-represented in diplomacy and the international organizations.

VI.1. CENTRAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES WITH DIPLOMATIC RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Office of the President of the Republic (Diplomatic Affairs Division)

Table 7. Proportion of women occupying diplomatic posts in the Office of the President of the Republic

Post	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
Attaché	1	2	3	66.66
Chargé de mission	2	0	2	0
TA	1	0	1	0

Source: MINREX, DAG, 1998.

2. Ministry of External Relations

Table 8. Women holding senior posts in the Ministry of External Relations

Post	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
Minister	1	0	1	0
Assistant Minister	2	0	2	0
SG	1	0	1	0
Inspector General	3	0	3	0
National Inspector	3	0	3	0
Technical Adviser	2	1	3	33.33
Director	10	0	10	0
Assistant Director	29	1	30	3.3
Head of Service	56	14	70	20

Source: MINREX, DAG, 1998.

VI.2. DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS

Table 9. Percentage of women in diplomatic missions

Post	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
Ambassador	25	1	26	3.8
Counsellor, First and Second	40	4	44	9.09
Secretary, First	35	2	37	5.40
Secretary, Second	23	4	27	14.8

Source: MINREX, DAG, 1998.

Table 10. Percentage of women in the various diplomatic grades

Grade	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
Minister Plenipotentiary	22	3, of whom only 1 is active	25	12
Counsellor, Foreign Affairs	4	0	4	0
Secretary, Foreign Affairs	123	17	140	12.14

Source: MINREX, DAG, 1998.

VI.3. INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Table 11. Percentage of women in the international organizations

International organization	Post	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
United Nations Secretariat	P5	2	0	2	0
	P4	4	1	5	20
	P3	3	2	5	40
UNITAR	-	1	0	1	0
AIPO	-	2	0	2	0
OAU	-	2	6	8	75
ICO	P5	1	0	1	0
UNDP	P5	2	1	3	33.3
	P3	5	1	6	16.6
ICAO	-	2	0	2	0
FAO	-	4	0	4	0

/...

International organization	Post	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
ITU	-	1	0	1	0
UNESCO	D1	1	0	1	0
	P5	2	0	2	0
	P4	1	0	1	0
	P3	1	0	1	0
WMO	P	0	1	1	100
ILO	D1	1	0	1	0
	P	4	0	4	0
ITTO	-	1	0	1	0
IMF	-	4	0	4	0
ADB	-	1	0	1	0
UNFPA	-	4	0	4	0
CTCA	Senior officials	2	0	2	0
IBRD	Assistants to Directors and the like	5	2	7	28.5
BEAC	Senior officials	46	2	48	4.1
WFP	-	2	0	2	0
UNIDO	-	3	0	3	0
IPU	-	1	0	1	0
WIPO	-	1	0	1	0
WHO	P5	3	1	4	25
	P4	2	0	2	0
	P3	4	0	4	0
UNICEF	-	2	0	2	0
ECA	P5	1	0	1	0
	P4	5	0	5	0
	P3	2	0	2	0
ACP-EEC	-	3	0	3	0

Source: MINREX, DAG, 1998.

CHAPTER VII

ACQUISITION/ATTRIBUTION, CHANGE AND RETENTION OF NATIONAL TY

(Article 9)

VII.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Cameroonian nationality was introduced on the eve of Independence on 1 January 1960 by Ordinance No. 59-66 of 28 November 1959. It was attributed to individuals who had the status of Cameroonian subjects on 1 January 1960.

Following the reunification of the two Cameroons on 1 October 1961, Cameroonian nationality was extended retrospectively to natives of West Cameroon, then under British trusteeship, by Federal Law No. 68-LF-3 of 11 June 1968 establishing the Cameroonian Nationality Code. Thus, art. 45 of this law stipulates that:

> "Individuals who on 1 January 1960, in East Cameroon, had the status of Cameroonian subjects and on 1 October 1961, in West Cameroon, had the status of a native of that State are considered to be Camerooniens."

In its Preamble, the Constitution of 18 January 1996 expressly guarantees all citizens, without distinction as to sex, the rights and freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and all international conventions relating thereto duly ratified by Cameroon. However, the Constitution makes no mention of the right to nationality. It is therefore necessary to refer to art. 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 which reads:

> "1. Everyone has the right to a nationality.
>
> 2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality."

Because of the place assigned to the provisions of human rights conventions in the Cameroonian legal system, the right to a nationality is a constitutional right (see above). The particular circumstances of history, ethnic origin, religion and language have no effect on nationality. Indeed, in the words of the Preamble to the Constitution:

> "Proud of our linguistic and cultural diversity, an enriching feature of our national identity, but profoundly aware of the imperative need to further consolidate our unity, we, the people of Cameroon, solemnly declare that we constitute one and the same nation ..."

In any event, Law No. 68-LF-3 of 11 June 1968 establishing the Cameroonian Nationality Code is in conformity with the Constitution as regards equality between the sexes and makes no distinction between men and women as regards the attribution, change or retention of Cameroonian nationality.

The same law does make a distinction between the attribution of Cameroonian nationality by origin and the acquisition of that nationality after birth.

VII.2. ACQUISITION/ATTRIBUTION, CHANGE AND RETENTION OF CAMEROONIAN NATIONALITY

1. Attribution of Cameroonian nationality by origin

Cameroonian nationality is attributed on the basis of filial relation or birth in Cameroon.

(a) Filial relation

Articles 6, 7 and 8 of the above-mentioned Law No. 68 list six possible circumstances:

According to article 6, a child has Cameroonian nationality if it is "a legitimate child of Cameroonian parents" or "a natural child, when both parents with respect to whom filiation has been established are Cameroonian".

According to article 7, a child has Cameroonian nationality if it is "a legitimate child one of whose parents is Cameroonian" or "a natural child when the parent with respect to whom filiation was established in the first instance is Cameroonian while the other parent is a foreign national, subject to the right of the minor to renounce Cameroonian nationality during the six months before he comes of age if he was not born in Cameroon or if, in accordance with the national law of that foreigner, he is able to avail himself of the latter's nationality."

According to article 8, a child has Cameroonian nationality if it is "a legitimate child of a Cameroonian mother and a father who has no nationality or whose nationality is unknown" or "a natural child when the parent with respect to whom filiation was established in the second instance is Cameroonian, if the other parent has no nationality or his/her nationality is unknown."

(b) Birth in Cameroon

Article 9 attributes Cameroonian nationality to any child born in Cameroon of unknown parents, provided that during its minority filiation is not established with respect to a foreigner.

Article 10 extends the presumption of birth in Cameroon to a newborn child found in Cameroon.

According to article 11:

> "The following shall be Cameroonian, subject to the right to renounce that status during the six months before coming of age:
>
> (a) a legitimate child born in Cameroon of foreign parents, if one of them was himself/herself born in Cameroon;

/...

(b) a natural child born in Cameroon when the parent with respect to whom filiation was established in the first instance was himself/herself born in Cameroon."

Finally, under the terms of article 12, Cameroonian nationality is acquired as of right, simply as a result of being born on Cameroonian territory, by anyone unable to avail himself/herself of any other nationality of origin.

2. Acquisition, change and retention of Cameroonian nationality after birth

The Cameroonian legislation mentions four possible ways of acquiring Cameroonian nationality after birth: by marriage (arts. 17, 18 and 19); by birth and residence in Cameroon or adoption or restoration of the former nationality of the parents (arts. 20, 21, 22 and 23); by naturalization (arts. 24, 25, 26 and 27); and, finally, by restoration of former nationality (arts. 28 and 29).

Only the first way, which concerns women, will be examined.

(1) (a) A Cameroonian woman who marries a foreigner retains her Cameroonian nationality even if she acquires the nationality of the husband (art. 32).

(2) (a) A foreign woman who marries a Cameroonian man can acquire Cameroonian nationality by declaration at the time of marriage (art. 17). She may also declare that she is not taking Cameroonian nationality, provided she can prove that after marriage she will retain her nationality of origin.

She may also, after marriage, acquire Cameroonian nationality by naturalization (art. 25).

There appears to be a tendency for the National Civil Law Reform Commission to favour the legal extension of dual nationality to mixed couples, on the basis of social developments and the interests of women.

Furthermore, women have the right to travel with their under-age children on their own passport, which they can obtain without their husband's authorization.

CHAPTER VIII

ACCESS OF WOMEN TO EDUCATION

(Article 10)

The Constitution establishes the compulsory nature of primary education and the right of all, without discrimination, to receive an education. In practice, however, socio-cultural factors may lead some parents and some families to favour the education of boys to the detriment of the education of girls, on the grounds that the latter are unproductive and destined to establish families elsewhere.

VIII.1. CONDITIONS FOR VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE, ACCESS TO STUDIES AND ACHIEVEMENT OF DIPLOMAS IN EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS OF ALL CATEGORIES

The Cameroonian educational system makes no distinction between girls and boys. The proportion of girls falls progressively as the level of education rises, particularly in the sciences.

1. Primary education

In Cameroon, primary education is the level with the largest number of pupils, estimated at about 2 million in 1997. The enrolment rate is steadily falling. Thus, from 78 per cent in 1984 it dropped to 61 per cent in 1995.[1]

The following table shows the trend in the number of primary school pupils between 1990 and 1995.

Table 12. Trend in the number of primary school pupils between 1990 and 1995

Year	Girls	Boys	Total	Percentage girls
1990/91	904 179	1 059 967	1 964 146	46
1991/92	906 429	1 053 370	1 959 799	46.3
1992/93	913 132	1 002 016	1 915 148	47.7
1993/94	891 530	1 001 248	1 892 778	47.1
1994/95	893 617	1 003 105	1 896 722	47.1

Source: Statistical Yearbooks of the Education Council, 1995.

[1] Draft New Policy of Education, 1997.

Between 1990 and 1992, the school population at this level of education increased steadily by about 5 per cent per year. However, from the beginning of the school year 1993/94 numbers started to fall due to pupils dropping out as a result of the economic crisis. This decline was to intensify with the devaluation of the CFA franc and the sharp fall in civil service salaries.

Between 1985 and 1991, remarkable progress was made with the provision of education following the opening of a large number of primary schools.

2. General secondary education

With about 18 per cent of pupils, general secondary education is of great importance for Cameroon. It trains children aged from 12 to 18 and provides the student with a body of general and scientific knowledge that will determine his or her choice of future occupation.

Table 13. Trend in the number of secondary school pupils between 1990 and 1996

Year	Girls	Boys	Total	Percentage girls
1990/91	148 690	218 299	366 986	41
1992/93	182 694	260 550	443 244	41
1994/95	185 057	273 084	458 141	40
1995/96	185 248	273 820	459 068	40

Source: idem.

As compared with boys, the number of girls obtaining access to secondary education is low. This is a consequence, among other things, of social prejudice against the education of girls.

As distinct from primary education, which is more widespread, general secondary education is more heavily concentrated in the urban areas. However, the authorities are making efforts to set up colleges in some large villages.

At the same time, the Cameroonian education system does not discriminate in any way between girls and boys. There is no doubt that in the official institutions education is mixed and boys and girls have equal opportunities.

In short, there are more boys than girls enrolled in primary and general secondary education.

The problem of the underrepresentation of girls among those taking science courses first arises in the second grade of the French-speaking education system and in the fourth form of the English-speaking education system.

In general, the percentage of girls taking science courses in Cameroon is very low. By way of illustration, the percentage of girls taking second-cycle science courses, by province, is as follows:

Adamaoua:	3%	Central:	13%
Far North:	2%	East:	7%
Littoral:	14%	North:	4%
North-West:	11%	West:	24%
South:	11%	South-West:	11%

Source: Situation report on the enrolment of girls and performance in the scientific disciplines, FEMSA-Cameroon, September 1997.

Similarly, out of a sample of 10,650 candidates for Baccalaureate C in five consecutive years only 512 or 4.8 per cent were girls, while out of a sample of 27,526 candidates for Baccalaureate D during the same period 6,348 or 23.06 per cent were girls.

The reasons for these low percentages of girls are both internal and external to the girl herself (internal contradictions, prejudices with regard to women and the sciences, the duration of the studies, the attitude of the parents).

3. Technical and vocational education

Where technical and vocational education is concerned, post-primary education should be distinguished from technical education proper.

Post-primary education is vocational in nature and comprises sections of two types, namely: Craft and Rural Sections (SAR) and Domestic Sections (SM). This type of education mainly attracts girls who drop out at the primary level. The figures show that the proportion of girls (heavily concentrated in the SM) declined from 30.5 per cent in 1975-76 to 22.15 per cent in 1984-85.[4]

This fall in the proportion of women is attributable to their improved "educational life expectancy".

In technical education, girls are generally less numerous than boys. According to a study carried out in 1992 by the Ministry of Social and Women's Affairs (MINASCOF) on "the factors affecting enrolment and drop-out among girls", girls account for about 40.4 per cent of the total number enrolled. This study also shows that 69 per cent of the girls enrolled in technical

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[4] MINPAT/Planning Directorate, Seminar-Workshop on the formulation of national demographic policy "Demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the female population", pp. 23-24, 1988.

education are training to be typists and secretaries or taking so-called women's courses (sewing, domestic science, social services).

4 Higher education

According to the aforementioned study, girls account for about 23 per cent of the total number of students in higher education. Only a few of them are studying science. In 1991, only 17 per cent of the students enrolled in the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Yaoundé were girls.

VIII.2 ACCESS TO THE SAME CURRICULA AND EXAMINATIONS AND TO SCHOOL PREMISES AND EQUIPMENT OF THE SAME QUALITY

There are no discriminatory measures with respect to girls and women in these areas; the curricula and examinations, like the equipment, are available without distinction to girls and boys, except in a few denominational schools reserved exclusively for boys.

VIII.3 ELIMINATION OF ANY STEREOTYPED CONCEPT OF THE ROLES OF MEN AND WOMEN

Sending girls to school has long been perceived as an unprofitable investment. In Cameroon, this perception is more deeply entrenched in the Islamized region where sending girls to school is regarded as tending to undermine traditional and moral values. Moreover, with the fall in household purchasing power resulting from the economic crisis through which the country is passing, the education of children has increasingly come to be seen as an investment on which to capitalize. In this respect, as far as the family is concerned, boys appear to be a better risk than girls who are generally expected to leave home to become part of another family.

The Cameroonian Marriage Code specifies 15 as the minimum legal age for girls to marry and 18 for boys. Thus, at a very early age girls may find themselves deflected from their school career and exposed to the risks of early and/or undesired marriages and pregnancies or sexual harassment in and out of school. In the heavily Islamized regions, when a girl is first married her age will often be below the statutory minimum.

At the socio-cultural level, the status and preferred role of the young girl are defined in terms of the customary principles governing society. Thus, from an early age, the parents instil in their daughters attitudes and standards intended to prepare them for the role of wife, mother and productive citizen, whereas boys are responsible for the family heritage from birth.

VIII.4. SCHOLARSHIPS AND OTHER STUDY GRANTS

All applications are examined in the same way by a committee which gives precedence to scientific subjects new to Cameroon. Thus, special grants are offered to students wishing to pursue studies in these fields. The Ministry of Women's Affairs is represented on this committee and makes sure that girls are awarded their fair share of scholarships.

VIII.5. ACCESS TO PROGRAMMES OF CONTINUING EDUCATION, INCLUDING ADULT AND FUNCTIONAL LITERACY PROGRAMMES

The Government of Cameroon is making a notable effort in the field of access to basic education for all, but the illiteracy rate among women is still high. Moreover, serious disparities remain between regions, the big cities and the rural areas and between age groups. For example, in the provinces of the Far North 64 per cent of the children who could be enrolled are not, and the difference between the enrolment rates for girls and boys is 14 per cent as compared with 9 per cent nationally.

The main obstacles to the development of education for girls are pinpointed in a study of the factors with a negative effect on the underenrolment of girls in Cameroon's schools commissioned by the Ministry of Social and Women's Affairs and revised by the NGO AGRO-PME (Small and Medium-Sized Agricultural Enterprises):

- lack of a birth certificate, which impedes enrolment and access to official examinations;
- early and undesired marriages and pregnancies;
- socio-cultural traditions that restrict the participation of women in social life;
- a mistaken social perception of the modern school on the part of parents and the community;
- the intensive exploitation of girl labour on farms and in households;
- curricula that fail to meet the basic educational needs of the target groups in terms of local cultural values.

With the assistance of UNICEF, the Government has introduced a basic education programme for girls in the northern provinces.

The three components of this programme are as follows:

- girls' basic education project;
- social mobilization project on behalf of young girls;
- girls' non-formal basic education project.

This programme aims to improve access to school for girls by 10 per cent a year and to reduce the drop-out rate by 15 per cent.

In addition, the fact that women constitute a majority of the Cameroonian population (51 per cent), together with their low level of education, has led various ministerial departments and specialized agencies [Youth and Sports, Agriculture, Livestock, Women's Affairs, Employment and Labour, Social Affairs, National Employment Foundation] to adopt functional literacy programmes and non-formal basic education as a means of reaching this important group.

In parallel with this government action, several denominational and lay, as well as community, NGOs have developed alternative education and literacy programmes.

These alternatives are intended to serve as a bridge back to the normal education cycle or as a means of integration into the labour market. However, their impact is being blunted by a number of constraints:

- shortage of structures and qualified personnel;

  The Ministry of Youth and Sports has about 115 youth and recreation centres and 75 literacy centres and supervises 60 youth movements and associations.

  The Ministry of Women's Affairs has 26 operational centres for the advancement of women and plans to have one centre in each departmental capital (or 58 altogether).

  Moreover, 84 rural leadership pools are open and 37 closed because of the freeze on recruitment to the civil service and retirements.

  The Ministry of Social Affairs has 100 or so social centres and home-workshops.

  The Ministry of Agriculture has rural promotion structures.

- financial constraints leading to the defection of beneficiaries;

- shortage of teaching materials and equipment;

- conservative attitudes;

- the negative aspects of certain religious factors;

- curricula and content ill-adapted to the needs and resources of the community and to the social demand for labour;

- lack of coordination and collaboration;

- failure to exploit non-formal education structures;

- non-acceptance of the certificates and attestations issued by such structures in relation to the professional scale in force;

- lack of competitiveness of the graduates of this system on the job market and their difficulty in integrating into the formal education system.

VIII.6. REDUCTION OF DROP-OUT RATES

In general, the school drop-out rate varies with the cycle:

- at the primary level, the estimated rate is 6.4 per cent for girls as compared with 5.6 per cent for boys;

- at the secondary level, it is 14.2 per cent for girls as compared with 10.6 per cent for boys.

The differences are more pronounced in higher education.

Moreover, since 1992, there has been a decline in the enrolment rate for girls as a result of the economic crisis, which has aggravated the problem of the protection, safety and retention of girls at school.

Aware of this problem, the Government has set up an informal basic education project which is based on a social mobilization approach and has been developed in the field in the Far North region, with the support of UNICEF. This project is currently being extended to the East province.

The project objectives are as follows:

- to convince the national community of the need for education for girls;

- to limit the dropping out and under-enrolment associated with socio-economic and cultural factors;

- to eliminate all forms of prejudice and discrimination with regard to schooling for young girls;

- to encourage a change of mentality and a more favourable social perception of school and the role of girls;

- to make girls and their parents more aware of the advantages of a better basic education;

- to keep pregnant girls in school;

- to extend the age of school admission for girls in those areas where enrolment is low and the population consists of marginal groups (pygmies, bororos, hill people, inhabitants of inaccessible or frontier areas);

- to increase the supply of education, even in low-density areas;

- to intensify advocacy campaigns and mobilize society on behalf of women;

- to introduce education into family life in order to reduce the early and/or undesired pregnancy rate;

- to increase the number of girls enrolled in school;

- to reduce wastage by improving attendance among girls, with particular emphasis on the regions with low enrolment.

VIII.7. OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY IN SPORTS AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

There are no restrictions except in cases of physical incapacity and/or where medically inadvisable.

Both males and females are admitted to the National Youth and Sports Institute (INJS) and girls can practise any sport there.

Moreover, women's football teams participate in competitions at both national and international level. The State assigns sports and physical education teachers to the traditional and non-formal educational establishments under a programme funded from the State budget. Girls and boys compete in all disciplines in the games organized annually by the National School Sports Federation (FENASCO).

VIII.8. ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON HEALTH, FAMILY WELL-BEING AND FAMILY PLANNING

The Ministry of Women's Affairs is promoting a women's education programme in the context of non-formal basic education and functional education involving:

- information;

- awareness-raising;

- education (educational chats);

- training;

- social mobilization.

Education programmes have been set up within the context of the AIDS programme and in connection with sexual mutilation, family planning, fundamental rights, and the education and/or protection of young girls.

CHAPTER IX

ACCESS OF WOMEN TO EMPLOYMENT

(Article 11)

In the Cameroonian context in general, in 1987 women accounted for about 42 per cent of the economically active population in work. They were most numerous in agriculture with 50 per cent of the total, followed by services (about 25 per cent) and industry (15 per cent). Moreover, they made up 15 per cent of dependent workers.

- On 30 June 1992, in the public sector or administration, they accounted for about 28 per cent of the establishment. Today, however, this figure needs to be revised downwards because of staff cutbacks and the lowering of the retirement age, which has particularly affected the lower grades where women are over-represented.

- As for the informal sector, it includes most of the self-employed, including a high proportion of the economically active female population (about 58 per cent in 1987).

Moreover, one head of household in five is a woman. It should be noted that in Cameroon the domestic work done by women is not yet taken into account in the system of national accounts.

With respect to standard of living, most Cameroonian households are classed below the poverty threshold. Women, who make up 51.9 per cent of those living in these households, are the ones who suffer most hardship. At the same time, the middle households, which account for 18.3 per cent of the population, have a composition that is only 48.4 per cent female and 51.6 per cent male.

This tendency for the proportion of women to fall as the standard of living rises is common to all the regions.

Table 14. Percentage of women by standard of living and by region

Standard of living/region	Total female population				Women heads of household			
	Poor	Interm.	Non-P.	Overall	Poor	Interm.	Non-P.	Overall
Yaoundé	50.2	50.0	51.8	50.8	15.5	28.1	40.3	32.4
Douala	42.0	48.96	47.1	46.6	8.3	16.0	20.4	17.4
Other cities	54.6	52.3	46.3	50.8	25.0	11.7	25.6	20.1
Forest	52.1	50.4	49.5	51.4	15.6	13.4	27.1	16.0
High plateaux	51.7	49.5	46.3	50.6	8.4	21.7	26.9	16.5
Savannah	53.3	49.7	52.5	52.1	13.6	4.9	22.1	11.8
Overall	51.9	50.2	50.8	50.8	12.9	13.9	26.7	17.2

Source: ECAM 96/DSTAT.

Specifically, there are three main aspects to article 11 of the Convention, namely:

- the rights exercised by women on a basis of equality with men;
- the measures taken to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of marriage or maternity;
- the periodic review of the legislation to protect women.

IX.1. THE RIGHTS EXERCISED BY WOMEN ON A BASIS OF EQUALITY WITH MEN

1. The right to work as an inalienable right of all human beings

2. The right to the same employment opportunities, including the application of fair criteria for selection in matters of employment

These two aspects are enshrined in various pieces of national legislation:

(a) The Constitution whose Preamble clearly states that "everyone shall have the right and obligation to work".

(b) The Labour Code, according to whose art. 2(1) "the right to work is recognized as a fundamental right of every citizen".

(c) The Civil Service Regulations, according to whose art. 12(1) "access to the Civil Service is open, without discrimination, to any Cameroonian national who satisfies the requirements with respect to age, physical fitness and good character".

3. The right to free choice of profession and employment, the right to promotion, job security and all benefits and conditions of service and the right to vocational training and retraining

In general, the law does not discriminate against women.

Article 2 of the Labour Code is explicit as regards the right to job security: "The State must do everything possible to help citizens to find a job and to retain it once found". Furthermore, paragraph 2 of the same article prohibits forced or compulsory labour.

Similarly, article 24 of the Civil Service Regulations states that "The civil servant shall enjoy the following rights vis-à-vis the administration:

- the right to protection;
- the right to remuneration;
- the right to a pension;
- the right to health;
- the right to in-service training;
- the right to leave;
- the right to participation."

All these rights are applicable to and enjoyed by men and women without distinction.

4. The right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value, as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work

On 25 May 1970, Cameroon ratified ILO Convention No. 100 of 1951 on equality of remuneration. The provisions of this Convention are incorporated in art. 61(2) of the Labour Code which states: "For the same conditions of work and level of skill, the wage shall be the same for all workers, regardless of their origin, sex, age or status".

With regard to the system for the evaluation of the quality of work, the Civil Service Regulations (Section 1, Chapter III, art. 42) read as follows: "As soon as the fiscal year has ended and at the latest by 31 August of each year, the professional performance of the civil servant shall be evaluated in terms of the objectives assigned, the time allowed for their achievement and the quality of the results."

Paragraph 2 of the same article goes further, stipulating that the evaluation shall determine the course of the official's career, particularly as regards promotion or redundancy.

5. The right to social security, particularly in cases of retirement, unemployment, sickness, invalidity and old age and other incapacity to work, as well as the right to paid leave

The right to social security is enshrined in Social Security Organization Ordinance No. 73-17 of 22 May 1973.

Article 1 of the Ordinance reads as follows: "There shall be set up a social security organization responsible, within the framework of general government policy, for administering the various benefits for which the social and family protection legislation provides."

Only dependent workers fall within the areas of social security currently covered in Cameroon. Moreover, regardless of gender, unemployment benefit does not feature among the various benefits provided.

6. The right to protection of health and to safety in working conditions, including the safeguarding of the function of reproduction

Title VI of the Labour Code deals with occupational health and safety.

In accordance with art. 95 of the Code, hygiene and safety conditions in the workplace are defined by order of the Minister responsible for labour matters. Thus, Order No. 39/MTPS/IMT of 24 November 1984 lays down general measures.

As far as health is concerned, art. 98 of the same Code requires every enterprise and every establishment of whatever description, public or private, lay or religious, civil or military, including those associated with the exercise of liberal professions and those controlled by trade associations or trade unions, to organize a medical and health service for the benefit of the employees.

The provisions of the Civil Service Regulations similarly protect the health and safety of civil servants. Thus, art. 25 stipulates that "The State is required to protect the official against any threats, abuse, violence, assault, insults or slander to which he may be exposed because or when he is performing his functions." Later, art. 31(2) stipulates that "The State is required to protect the official against work-related accidents and occupational diseases."

Article 84(1) of the Labour Code throws light on the question of safeguarding the reproductive function. The substance of this article is reproduced below in the section devoted to the legislation for the protection of the working woman.

The availability of 14 weeks of maternity leave for women and 3 days of paternity leave for men likewise reflects the authorities' concern to safeguard the function of reproduction.

Alongside these common provisions which apply equally to men and women (recruitment, working hours, rest periods, remuneration, hygiene and safety measures, premature termination of an employment contract), the Cameroonian

legislation contains special provisions to protect the working woman in her dual capacity of employee and mother.

It is clear from the foregoing that there is a full range of measures to protect the woman employee, although it is difficult to discern whether or not they are being applied.

IX.2. LEGISLATION TO PROTECT THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF THE WORKING WOMAN

1. Prohibition of dismissal on grounds of pregnancy

Article 84(1) of the Labour Code reads as follows: "Any pregnant woman whose condition has been medically confirmed may terminate her contract without notice and without being liable for that reason to pay compensation. During this period, the employer may not terminate the employment contract of the woman concerned on grounds of pregnancy."

2. Introduction of maternity leave with pay

This aspect features in art. 2 of ILO Convention 100, which has been ratified by Cameroon, and is reflected in various pieces of legislation:

(a) The Labour Code, art. 84(2) of which reads as follows:

> "Every pregnant woman has the right to fourteen (14) weeks of maternity leave beginning four (4) weeks before the expected date of confinement. This leave may be extended by six (6) weeks in the event of illness, duly confirmed, resulting from either pregnancy or childbirth. At no time during this period of leave may the employer terminate the employment contract of the woman concerned."

(b) The Civil Service Regulations

Under art. 66(1): "At her request and on presentation of a six-month pregnancy certificate, a female official shall be entitled to fourteen (14) weeks of maternity leave for confinement and nursing, with full pay. The certificate must indicate the expected date of confinement."

According to paragraph 4 of the same article, this leave can be extended by six weeks in the event of illness duly confirmed and resulting from either pregnancy or confinement.

3. Eligibility for an allowance while on maternity leave

Under art. 84(5) of the Labour Code, apart from the various benefits for which the social and family protection legislation provides, during maternity leave a woman has the right to receive, at the expense of the National Social Security Fund, a daily allowance equal in amount to the wage effectively payable at the time of suspension of the employment contract; she retains the right to benefits in kind.

4. The right of women to rest during the nursing period

Article 85(1) stipulates that "During a period of fifteen (15) months following the birth of the child, the mother shall have the right to rest breaks for nursing purposes" while, according to paragraph 3 of the same article, "During this period, the mother may terminate her contract without notice."

5. Prohibition of heavy and dangerous work

Under the terms of art. 83, the nature of the work which women and pregnant women, respectively, are prohibited from doing shall be defined by order of the Minister responsible for labour matters.

6. Prohibition of night work

It follows from art. 82(2) that women and children may not do night work in industry. Article 81 defines night work as any work done between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.

With regard to the provision of the necessary supporting social services, employers are having difficulty in establishing and operating day-care facilities within their enterprises.

Although Cameroon does have legislation containing provisions that protect the working woman, it is nonetheless true that some of these provisions are out of date and need revising.

IX.3. NEED FOR A PERIODIC REVIEW OF THE LEGISLATION FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE WORKING WOMAN

For the time being, there is no formal provision for a periodic review of out-of-date and inappropriate legislation. However, a national commission has been set up within the Prime Minister's services to revise the laws and regulations. Its general objective is to list all these texts and see how they might be reformed.

Although in many cases women are recognized as being entitled to the various fundamental rights, in reality they still face obstacles when it comes to exercising those rights.

1. In the field of employment

In the structured sector, women's employment opportunities are limited by their basic profile since it generally corresponds to parts of the labour market which are already saturated. Similarly, a woman's choice of occupation is often restricted by inappropriate basic training.

Moreover, the hiring practices of some employers infringe upon a woman's freedom to marry since she is often required to provide a certificate showing that she is unmarried.

The informal sector, where working women are more numerous, does not have access to the public social security system.

With respect to the application of the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value within the context of collective labour agreements, it must be acknowledged that in Cameroon working women generally know little about the administrative and legal systems, which makes it difficult for them to assess when their rights are being infringed.

Similarly, women take little interest in the process of collective bargaining whether inside or outside the enterprise, even though all important social and work-related decisions are discussed during this process before being endorsed by the Government. Accordingly, women should be urged and encouraged not only to join unions but also to take positions of responsibility within those unions. Tripartite bargaining (employers, workers and government) is a guarantee of dialogue and industrial peace.

Furthermore, there is as yet no national job classification, which makes it difficult to establish the percentage of women in low-paid and part-time jobs. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that jobs in the informal sector, where women are more numerous, are poorly paid, the average wage being CFAF 32,000 per month (Bureau of Statistics and National Accounts, 1993).

2. Protection of women from bodily harm

With respect to the violence to which women may be exposed at the workplace and in the home, there are provisions in the Criminal Code that establish penalties for assaults causing bodily harm. However, sexual harassment, a form of violence experienced on a daily basis by women at work, has not been legally defined, which makes it difficult to prosecute. Similarly, the lack of a legal definition of discrimination based on sex discourages women from complaining to the courts about the not easily classifiable practices of which they are the victims.

This situation is reflected in the lack of established precedents in this area of the law.

CHAPTER X

ACCESS OF WOMEN TO PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

(Article 12)

The health of the people is a government priority since a country that neglects the people's health can hardly be expected to develop socially and economically. This objective can only be achieved if the political will exists and the health and related sectors are prepared to combine their efforts.

X.1. SECTORAL HEALTH POLICY: MEASURES TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF THE PEOPLE

The priority objective of sectoral health policy (1992) is "to improve the state of health of the people by making comprehensive quality care more accessible to the whole of the population, with the full participation of the communities."

The essential components of this sectoral health policy, as incorporated in Framework Law No. 96/03 of 4 January 1996, are as follows:

- universal access to essential quality care through the development of health districts;
- reinforcement of the health care systems at every level (central, intermediate and peripheral);
- making essential generic pharmaceutical products affordable to the largest possible number of Cameroonians thanks to the creation of a National Essential Drugs Centre (CENAME);
- involvement of the communities in the co-financing and co-management of the health services (encouragement of dialogue at all levels through the establishment of health committees, management committees, etc.) with a view to their taking their share of responsibility for dealing with health problems;
- development of a partnership between government, the beneficiary communities and all the other interested parties.

This policy, whose operational strategy is based on the Declaration of National Policy for the reorientation of primary health care (PHC) and on a series of measures forming part of the priority programmes for making the health care system viable (one of these programmes is devoted specifically to the health of women and children), consists in giving the largest possible number of persons access to the care they need at a reasonable and bearable cost.

In this context, the health centres are the preferred means of establishing the interface between the community and the health services.

Since mothers and children constitute the most vulnerable group, in both urban and rural areas, MINSANTE has laid down the basic principles of health care provision for mothers and children in a re-updated document entitled "Policy and standards for maternal and child health and family planning services", the aim being to improve the provision and delivery of these services.

Altogether, there are 12 aspects to sectoral health policy:

- controlling endemic diseases and epidemics and epidemiological monitoring;
- primary health care;
- referrals;
- health care for women, children and youth, family planning;
- mental health;
- drugs and pharmaceutical policy;
- traditional medicine;
- infrastructure and equipment;
- rationalization of personnel management;
- health and management information system;
- financing of the health sector;
- operational research.

This policy is being implemented through programmes (including the National Family Health Programme, which incorporates a dozen priority sub-programmes for mothers and children) backed by 30 or so projects, 4 of which are specifically targeted at women, namely:

- Women-Population-Development;
- Maternal and Child Health;
- Discrimination in Traditional Practices;
- EVA Project (Education in Life and Love).

This new health policy of the Government of Cameroon reflects the priority it is giving to this sector and its desire significantly to improve the health indicators for the population in general, and women and children in particular, over the course of the next 10 years.

To achieve the aim of improving women's health and nutrition, seven priority areas have been marked out:

1. Priority areas

- reduction of risk factors;
- adequacy of health coverage;
- raising the level of education of women;
- higher incomes for women;
- improved household food security;
- educating the public about health and nutrition;
- inclusion of women in health management.

Special attention should be paid to the reduction of risk factors in view of its potential for improving women's health.

The state of women's health remains precarious due to a series of interdependent factors (serial childbirths, food taboos, traditional practices, hard work in the home and on the land) which lessen their ability to work and undermine their constitution. Thus, improved health and nutrition depend on the implementation of strategies designed to solve these problems.

The necessary measures mainly involve:

- developing a programme to support the campaign against the malnutrition and lack of micro-nutrients which are degrading the health of women and children;
- setting up a social mobilization programme to make people, especially men and the traditional authorities, aware of the highly deleterious effects of food taboos and certain traditional practices on the health of women and children;
- increase people's awareness of sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS (an IEC campaign has been organized with the support of the mass media);
- promote genital cancer screening and treatment;
- lighten women's workload (especially that of rural women) by facilitating their access at reduced cost to appropriate or intermediate technologies;
- increase the level of access to drinking water in urban and especially rural areas by building new works and introducing a national maintenance policy for the existing installations;

- intensify the programme of education in responsible parenthood by involving all the groups concerned: young people, parents, adults. The programme should be incorporated into the school system and delivered in both urban centres and rural areas;

- promote the practice of breast-feeding up to the age of at least 6 months.

Within this framework a number of projects are being carried out.

2. Ongoing programmes and projects

- the breast-feeding programme;

- the campaign against iodine-deficiency disorders;

- the campaign against protein-energy malnutrition;

- the campaign against deficiency anaemias;

- the Women-Population-Development project;

- the campaign against AIDS;

- the Maternal and Child Health/Family Planning project;

- the Education in Responsible Parenthood project;

- the Nutrition Education pilot project;

- the COP-MIR project (communication for taking into account population problems in rural areas);

- the Guinea Worm Eradication project;

- the Health-Fertility-Nutrition project, which is in the start-up phase.

By and large, all these projects and programmes are making a real contribution to improving the living conditions of the population in general and women in particular. For example, the campaign against iodine-deficiency disorders has led to the introduction of iodine into cooking salt in Cameroon.

Some of these projects are now being carried out by NGOs.

The public, quasi-public and private hospitals and medical centres are actively engaged in operating these programmes and projects. The public health care units include:

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category 1:	2 general hospitals;
category 2:	3 central hospitals;
category 3:	9 provincial hospitals;
categories 4 and 6:	158 district medical centres;
basic medical services:	170 integrated health centres;
gynaecological services:	51 maternal and child welfare and maternity units.

3. Measures relating to offences against women and children

These offences are characterized in a series of provisions of the Criminal Code.

(a) Abortion: art. 337

1. "A woman who procures an abortion herself or consents thereto shall be liable to imprisonment for 15 days to 1 year or a fine of 5,000 to 200,000 francs or both.

2. Whoever procures an abortion for a woman, even with her consent, shall be liable to imprisonment for 1 to 5 years and a fine of 100,000 to 2,000,000 francs.

3. The penalties under paragraph 2 shall be doubled:

(a) for anyone who habitually practises abortion;

(b) for anyone engaged in a medical or related profession.

4. In addition, the professional premises may be ordered to be closed and the practice of the profession prohibited."

(b) The use of violence against a pregnant woman: art. 338

"Anyone who by using violence against a pregnant woman or against a child in the process of being born causes, even unintentionally, the death or permanent disability of the child shall be liable to imprisonment for 5 to 10 years and a fine of 100,000 to 2,000,000 francs."

(c) Exceptions: art. 339

1. "Articles 337 and 338 shall not apply if the acts are performed by an authorized person and justified by the need to save a mother whose health is at grave risk.

2. In the case of pregnancy resulting from rape, medical abortion shall not be an offence if carried out after the State prosecutor has attested to the materiality of the facts."

(d) Infanticide: art. 340

"A mother who is principal perpetrator or accomplice in the manslaughter or murder of her child within a month of its birth shall be liable only to 5 to 10 years' imprisonment. These provisions may not be applied to the other perpetrators or accomplices."

X.2. IDENTIFICATION OF THE ACTORS

In Cameroon, the cause of health receives support from both the Government and the private sector.

1. Public sector

Responsibility for the implementation of the Government's health policy falls mainly upon the Ministry of Health, which collaborates with the other ministries.

(a) Ministry of Health

The seven directorates of the Ministry of Health, organized by Decree No. 95/040 of 7 March 1995, include the Community Health Directorate and the Family Health Sub-Directorate whose main concern is the protection of women and children. The Sub-Directorate is responsible for:

- the promotion and protection of maternal health;
- the inspection and monitoring of maternity hospitals;
- the organization of campaigns against genetic diseases;
- the organization, supervision and protection of maternal health and the health of infants and juveniles;
- the surveillance and nutrition education of mothers and children;
- health education;
- the definition of child protection strategies and action plans.

Moreover, Decree No. 95/013 of 7 February 1995 organizes the basic health services in health districts. This new subdivision of the country into health areas and districts, which is governed by operational and efficiency criteria rather than mere administrative logic, makes it possible to deal comprehensively with all the population's health problems. Thus, children and pregnant women can be best cared for at the health area level because the team working at the centre is familiar with their social and physical environment. Within the context of this reorganization there is provision for activities at every level with a view to solving most of the health and nutritional problems of children and pregnant women.

In addition, Law No. 96/03 of 4 January 1996 establishes the general framework for State action in the health field and the objectives of national

health policy in Cameroon. According to article 4(3) of this framework law, which is mainly intended to provide a legal basis for the partnership between the State and the communities: "One of the main principles on which national health policy is based is the protection and promotion of the health of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, particularly women, children, adolescents, older persons, the poor and the disabled".

As far as the staffing of the health service is concerned, women are adequately represented in the various branches.

Table 15. Breakdown of health service personnel by profession and gender

Profession	Men	Women	Total	Percentage women
Doctor	500	164	764	21.38
Pharmacist	14	12	26	46.15
Nurse	4 364	4 017	8 381	47.93
Sanitary engineering technician	51	24	75	28.23
Medico-sanitary technician	674	307	981	31.29
Midwife		119		100
Dental surgeon	53	26	79	31.64

Source: MINSANTE (1991).

(b) Ministry of Agriculture

As part of its services for farmers, MINAGRI has a unit specifically responsible for projects on behalf of women in agriculture. Through its extension workers this unit, which is part of the rural engineering and community development directorate, gives rural women tips on nutrition, food, health and environmental sanitation. It also advises on farming techniques and appropriate technology with a view to improving the women's income and productivity.

(c) Ministry of Mines, Water Resources and Energy

Within the context of the definition and application of water resource management policy, this department includes measures on behalf of women in its local water supply and management programmes.

(d) Ministry of National Education

Through its Health Directorate, this ministry is responsible for after-school and extracurricular activities involving the coordination of school health and social measures, in liaison with MINSANTE, and for sex education in the schools.

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(e) Ministry of Women's Affairs

As part of its task of providing guidance and continuing education for women, the Ministry of Women's Affairs includes in its programmes problems of health and nutrition. This particular service is provided by supporting institutions such as the Centres for the Advancement of Women and the leadership pools, through educational chats, health and nutritional education, diet demonstrations, etc.

(f) Ministry of Economics and Finance

Coordinates, supervises and monitors programmes and projects relating to the advancement of women.

(g) Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries

Organizes the production and quality control of foodstuffs of animal and fish origin.

(h) Ministry of Youth and Sports

Its main responsibility is to inform the public about health problems through its mobile urban health promotion teams.

(i) Ministry of the Environment and Forests

Coordinates the environmental protection and management activities of the different departments. Women are a prime target for awareness-raising in connection with the management of the various natural resources they utilize on a daily basis.

(j) Ministry of Territorial Administration

Together with the local authorities, this department is responsible for public hygiene and health.

(k) Ministry of Social Affairs

Has a directorate responsible for protecting the individual and the family and for grassroots services (Social Centres).

(l) Ministry of Communication

Provides technical supervision of the tripartite MINCOM-UNFPA-UNESCO programme through Information-Education-Communication strategies.

(m) Ministry of Towns

This newly created department has sanitation and highways among its principal responsibilities.

2. Private sector

In the private sector, the denominational and lay bodies merit attention because of the importance of their contribution and their special status as profit-making organizations.

The initiatives of the NGOs and humanitarian organizations should also be noted.

The traditional practitioners play a not inconsiderable part in the management of health problems in Cameroon.

CHAPTER XI

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN

(Article 13)

Women are not yet participating sufficiently in industrial, commercial, formal and craft activities. They are concentrated in the food, textile and clothing branches and excel in food production.

Women account for about 13.5 per cent of the participants in the structured sector and 9 per cent of promoters of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). They head 3.2 per cent of industrial and commercial enterprises and 5.3 per cent of service enterprises.

In the informal sector, about 18 per cent of enterprises are run by women. They are concentrated in the food trade where they account for about 81 per cent of retail sellers and 9 per cent of wholesalers.

Thus, women represent a considerable human potential in the formal and informal sectors. The development of these human resources is still being impeded by certain obstacles which will be examined in relation to the provisions of article 13.

XI.1. RIGHT TO FAMILY BENEFITS

Strictly speaking, in Cameroon there is no social security system that takes the non-wage earner, including unmarried mothers, into account. On the other hand, there is a social security system that caters for the dependent worker only.

Family benefits are available to both men and women workers without distinction. These benefits consist mainly of housing, family allowances and supplementary benefits, which vary with the number of children, and the partial payment of some of the recipient's medical expenses.

XI.2. RIGHT TO BANK LOANS, MORTGAGES AND OTHER FORMS OF FINANCIAL CREDIT

Although the credit legislation in force in Cameroon does not discriminate against women, there are several factors preventing the majority of them from obtaining access to formal loans.

1. The written law

Legislative provisions restrict women's legal capacity to offer guarantees with a view to obtaining a bank loan.

Thus, the right and freedom to pursue a commercial activity are limited by:

- Article 223 of the Civil Code and article 74 of the Ordinance of 29 June 1981, which recognize the husband's right to object to his wife's pursuing a separate profession;

- Article 7 of the Commercial Code, which authorizes the husband to put an end to the commercial activity of his wife simply by notifying his objection to the Registrar of the Commercial Court.

2. The terms and conditions offered by the banks

The banks' terms and conditions cannot easily be met by women farmers and traders because of:

- their lack of basic training in management and bookkeeping;

- their poor understanding of the notion of the return on a loan;

- their ignorance of banking and tax procedures;

- their lack of collateral and security.

In practice, some bankers demand the husband's guarantee as one of the conditions for granting a loan.

In order to make a start on overcoming some of these difficulties and obstacles, the Government has taken several specific measures on behalf of women, namely:

- the Priority Programme for the Promotion of SMEs led by the Ministry of Industrial and Commercial Development which specifically targets children, disabled persons and women. It is intended to bring about the swift and harmonious integration of women into the SME promotion effort by:

  - strengthening their ability to create and manage enterprises;

  - eliminating discrimination.

The Cooperative Societies Act (Law No. 92/006 of 16 August 1992) facilitated the establishment of decentralized financial institutions of a kind calculated to encourage entrepreneurship among women.

3. Customary practices

Because of the dead hand of custom, women find it difficult to become owners of property in general and land in particular.

XI.3. RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES, SPORTS AND ALL ASPECTS OF CULTURAL LIFE

The Government of Cameroon guarantees men and women without distinction the possibility of access to sports and leisure activities.

1. Sports

Women, who previously took part in only a few sports, are now represented in almost all the sports federations, including those for the so-called "reserved" sports such as judo, karate, football, etc.

However, their level of participation is still generally low:

- two athletes out of eight are girls;
- three sports teams out of twelve are women's teams, although some sports have no women's clubs.

Ignorance of what is involved has had a profound influence on women's participation in sports. Whereas educated parents tend to appreciate sports and games, those in the rural areas are still prejudiced against them.

Other obstacles also exist such as:

- motherhood and early marriage can bring the sporting careers of girls to a premature close;
- the timidity of young girls;
- lack of sponsorship for women's sports;
- women's everyday responsibilities;
- few sports teachers are women (out of every ten teachers giving physical education and sports lessons only one is a woman);
- families may lack sufficient means;
- inadequacy of the sports infrastructure in schools and universities;
- inadequacy of the private sports infrastructure.

2. Other cultural activities

There are several areas in which Cameroonian women are displaying their talents, in particular:

- crafts
- choreography
- theatre
- dance
- singing.

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Despite women's enthusiasm for things cultural, their level of involvement is relatively low.

This is attributable to such factors as:

- socio-cultural restraints, which prevent women from playing a full part in activities that take place outside the family circle;
- lack of support;
- lack of means.

The implementation of the recommendations of the Culture Forum encouraging the expansion of cultural activities in Cameroon will certainly enable women to become involved to a greater extent than before.

CHAPTER XII

THE SITUATION OF RURAL WOMEN

(Article 14)

XII.1. GENERAL SITUATION OF RURAL WOMEN

Rural women are playing a crucial role in ensuring food security in Cameroon. They account for 52 per cent of the rural population and produce about 90 per cent of the food.

However, they still experience hardship, suffering in particular from:

- lack of credit for agricultural production and extension activities;
- lack of health care;
- lack of information on the opportunities offered by the international market;
- lack of a basic education;
- the isolation of the production areas;
- difficulties of access to land ownership;
- excessive demands on their time;
- the arduous nature of their work.

During peak periods, rural women do 8 to 12 hours of agricultural work a day and spend almost as much time on household work, or 1.5 to 3 times more than the men, who only take care of the export crops.

Moreover, since statistical data broken down by gender are few or non-existent, the contribution of rural women to the development of society cannot be satisfactorily assessed.

Rural women generally receive support from rural organizers with only limited technical abilities considering the problems they are supposed to help to solve, namely:

- raising agricultural productivity;
- crop storage;
- processing and marketing of agricultural produce;
- drinking water supply;

- training;

- administration of health care.

It should be noted that the situation has improved as a result of the implementation of the National Agricultural Extension Services Programme (PNVA).

Moreover, the easing of the provisions of the Associations Act has encouraged the development of several NGOs and associations working to provide support for rural women.

XII.2. SITUATION OF RURAL WOMEN IN RELATION TO THE PROVISIONS OF ARTICLE 14 OF THE CONVENTION

The situation of rural women can be effectively assessed only in the light of certain leading indicators.

1. Participation in decision-making

The participation of rural women in decision-making, both within the family and in society, is still very low due to a number of obstacles:

- socio-cultural attitudes and inhibitions;

- lack of education in civics and economics;

- lack of financial resources;

- the passivity or timidity of the women;

- the excessive demands on women's time due to their multiple role (mother, wife and participant in development).

2. Access to adequate health care facilities

The authorities are making efforts to bring the health services closer to the people, especially in rural areas, by establishing health districts run by doctors and organizing a minimum package of activities, including reproductive health and nutrition.

3. Social security programmes

In Cameroon, the social security systems do not yet reach the rural population. Moreover, through lack of information and support, rural people find it difficult to obtain access to the insurance-guaranteed public security system.

4. Access to all types of education and training

The law makes no distinction between men and women as regards access to the educational and training establishments. However, rural girls are more likely to drop out of school than their urban sisters.

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Overall, the difficulties encountered by rural women and girls with respect to education and training are as follows:

- early marriages and pregnancies;
- sexist choices made by the parents;
- the low economic potential of rural families;
- excessive demands on women's time;
- persistent socio-cultural constraints;
- under-representation of women in mixed groups;
- shortage of women technically qualified to provide agricultural advisory and support services. It should be noted that the authorities are making efforts to improve the level of training of women even non-formally;
- the National Agricultural Extension Services Programme (PNVA) operates through mixed groups (men and women) and technical demonstration units. In the second phase of programme implementation it is planned to recruit nearly 200 women extension workers in order to address more effectively the concerns of rural women. In 1992/1993, the PNVA was using a total of 987 people including 32 women or 3.2 per cent. Today, it is using 117 women out of a total of 2,340 or 5 per cent;
- The training schools have been professionalized since 1994. They deliver useful and operational on-the-spot information in a specific field. Similarly, the NGOs and private institutions are working in rural development and encouraging women to organize in groups by providing training and information and transferring technology.

5. Organization of self-help groups

The Associations and COOP/GIC Acts of 1990 and 1992 encouraged rural women to organize themselves in groups. The number of joint initiative groups and associations is on the increase.

These bodies are useful on several counts:

- provision of a joint guarantee to facilitate access to credit;
- provision of low-cost services for members;
- means of integrating small farmers into the national economy;
- increased trade between the traditional sectors and the rest;
- technology transfer;
- ease of financial transactions.

The main difficulties relating to the organization of self-help groups are as follows:

- the weak internal structuring of the groups;
- the relatively undeveloped spirit of cooperation among the members;
- the lack of land specifically identified as belonging to the group;
- the low literacy rate among rural women.

6. Participation in all community activities

Of necessity, because they make a vital contribution to the stability and functioning of the family, rural women are becoming more and more involved in the management of the village community. At the same time, their exclusion from the administration of the family assets is encouraged by the existence of unfavourable legal provisions. Thus, article 1421 of the Civil Code reads: "The administration of the community property is entrusted to the husband who may sell, transfer or mortgage it without the consent of his wife". Similarly, article 1428 recognizes that: "The husband shall administer all the personal property of his wife. He may independently exercise any right of action to recover movable property or to protect or recover possession vested in the wife. He shall be responsible for any physical depreciation of his wife's personal property due to failure to take protective action".

7. Access of women to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes

Despite their important role in the economy, women still only have limited access to productive resources. According to the Ministry of Agriculture's estimates for 1996, overall, only about 17 per cent of farms are run by women. This national average conceals differences at the provincial level.

Table 16. Percentage of farms run by men and women respectively

Province	Total number of farms	Women	Percentage	Men	Percentage
South	83	12	14.5	71	85.5
Far North	146	11	7.5	135	92.5
East	121	20	20.2	101	79.8
Centre	221	43	16.5	178	83.5
Littoral	145	38	26.2	107	73.8
South-West	127	26	20.5	101	79.5
North-West	165	25	15.2	140	84.8
West	215	54	25.1	161	74.9
North	125	9	7.2	116	92.8
Adamaoua	84	6	7.1	78	92.9
Total	1 434	246	17.2	1 188	82.8

Source: MINAGRI (Agricultural Survey Directorate, 1996).

Women have difficulty in obtaining bank loans for the following reasons:

- inability to cope with the procedures and guarantee requirements of the commercial banks;
- scarcity of rural lending institutions;
- bankers not interested in projects that only generate low incomes;
- low quota of loans and subsidies available to women's groups;
- low literacy rate;
- limited financial resources;
- lack of business information and know-how;
- lack of organized marketing channels;
- poorly developed communications;
- underfunded NGOs and paucity of trade organizations;
- persistence of socio-cultural practices that restrict women's access to land, despite this being a resource essential to their self-fulfilment.

There are certain agencies that provide start-up support:

- the Rural Organization Support Fund (FONDAOR). Out of 2,290 grants awarded only 16 per cent went to women's groups;
- Decentralized Rural Credit;
- the National Employment Fund (FNE) provides advice and financing;
- the FIMAC programme;
- the Savings and Loan Cooperatives (COOPEC);
- the Women-Population-Development project which finances women's income-generating activities in the Far North and South-West provinces;
- the Productive Microprojects on behalf of the Women of Cameroon (MPPF-CAM) projects whose aim is to increase women's income while initiating them into the principles and rules of entrepreneurship;
- the women's pre-cooperatives and joint initiative groups;
- the First Ladies of Africa Programme for the economic advancement of rural women.

In addition, it should be noted that the diplomatic establishment and certain international organizations are making a significant contribution in this area.

8. Living conditions of rural women, particularly in respect of housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications

The following table sets out the characteristics of rural housing.

Table 17. Characteristics of rural housing in 1976 and 1987

Characteristic	1976	1987
Walls made of permanent materials	6%	7%
Metal, tile or slab roof	31%	54%
Cement floor with or without tiles	7%	15%
Ownership	94%	91%

Source: Demo. 1987, vol. III, Part 9: Summary of preliminary reports.

Thus, as only a small percentage of houses are built of permanent materials with cement floors, most rural people live in flimsy housing, although they generally own it themselves.

As regards access to drinking water, surveys show that the coverage has not improved very much during the last 20 years and in most places the traditional water points have remained the main source of supply.

Table 18. Breakdown of rural housing units by method of drinking water supply

Method of supply	1976	1987
Running water	4.3%	2.2%
Standpipe	4.6%	9.9%
Well	19.9%	41.5%
Springs	39.7%	10.7%
Marigot (backwater)	29.7%	35.2%
Other	2.4%	0.5%
Total	100%	100%

Source: Demographic surveys cited by UNDP/Republic of Cameroon in "Report on Human Development in Cameroon, 1993".

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In view of the low rural drinking water coverage (31 per cent) and the defective condition of most of the hydraulic works installed (60 per cent), the Government has launched the following water supply programme:

- one borehole equipped with a pump for every locality with 300 to 500 inhabitants;

- a water supply system for communities with 2,500 to 5,000 inhabitants.

Moreover, hydraulic rehabilitation programmes are being carried out all over the country under the new policy of encouraging the participation of the beneficiary communities in all phases of rural hydraulic engineering projects.

Thus, women are performing the daily chore of supplying the family with drinking water. In some areas, they are obliged to walk several miles in search of water.

As for rural hygiene and environmental sanitation, the latrine is the type of convenience most commonly employed (87.9 per cent of households in 1987) and waste water is allowed to drain away into the soil.

In 1987, the usual form of lighting in rural areas was the petrol lamp, to which 82.7 per cent of the population had access. Electricity is available only to a small privileged minority (4.24 per cent).

Wood is the fuel most commonly used for cooking in rural areas. In 1987, it was used by 96 per cent of households, with the remaining 4 per cent using either oil or gas or electricity.

CHAPTER XIII

EQUALITY OF MEN AND WOMEN BEFORE THE LAW

(Article 15)

XIII 1. EQUALITY OF MEN AND WOMEN BEFORE THE LAW

The Preamble to the Constitution enshrines the principle of the equality of men and women before the law in the following terms: "Human beings, without distinction as to race, religion, sex or belief, possess imprescriptible, inalienable and sacred rights ..."

"... All shall have equal rights and obligations ..."

"... the State shall guarantee all citizens of either sex the rights and freedoms set forth in the Preamble to the Constitution ..."

This last provision merits closer attention. As mentioned in the first part of the report, all international human rights conventions duly ratified by Cameroon form part of the Preamble to the Constitution. This applies to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which is more incisive concerning the equality of all before the law; thus article 7 reads: "All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination." All other subordinate laws and regulations must conform to this principle of the equality of all before the law, on pain of annulment on grounds of unconstitutionality.

XIII.2. LEGAL CAPACITY OF WOMEN

Legal capacity is taken to mean the power granted to someone to exercise his rights. Cameroonian law recognizes the legal capacity of both men and women. Article 216 of the Civil Code stipulates that "Women shall have full capacity as of right. The exercise of that capacity shall be limited only by the marriage contract and by law."

- Women may take part in court proceedings without having to have themselves represented.

  The only restrictions relate to:

  - age (the applicant must have turned 21 at the time of the action);
  - effective possession of rights (she must not have been deprived of her rights);
  - mental capacity (the applicant must be in possession of all her faculties and capable of understanding).

- They may conclude contracts, carry on a commercial activity on the same footing as a man and practise the profession of their choice.

There is, however, a restriction on the contractual capacity of a married woman. Thus, article 223 of the Civil Code authorizes the husband to object to the pursuit of a profession by his wife if he considers that it could be prejudicial to the interests of the family.

Moreover, article 7 of the Commercial Code empowers the husband to put an end to his wife's economic activity simply by notifying his objection to the Registrar of the Commercial Court.

However, the wife may go to court to seek the withdrawal of the objection on the grounds that her pursuit of a profession is not prejudicial to the interests of the household.

The administration of the community property is entrusted to the husband who may sell, transfer or mortgage it without the consent of his wife (arts. 1421 and 1428 of the Civil Code). If the husband is unable to express his wishes, the wife may represent him only if so authorized by the court (art. 219 of the Civil Code). All these discriminatory provisions have been identified and will definitely not be perpetuated in the new Civil Code in preparation.

XIII.3. NULLITY OF CONTRACTS AND MEASURES DIRECTED AT RESTRICTING THE LEGAL CAPACITY OF WOMEN

When a woman considers that an administrative decision discriminates against her, she may ask the administrative court to set it aside. In the case of a discriminatory private contract, she may apply to the ordinary courts for it to be declared null and void.

XIII.4. THE RIGHT OF WOMEN TO FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND CHOICE OF RESIDENCE AND DOMICILE

According to the Preamble to the Constitution, "Every person shall have the right to settle in any place and to move about freely, subject to the statutory provisions concerning public order and safety and the keeping of the peace." Since the proclamation of freedoms in 1990, Cameroonian women have enjoyed the freedom to come and go, especially married women for whom the need for the husband's authorization to obtain a visa was a serious infringement of that right.

To conclude, the legislation does not discriminate against women, except in the above-mentioned cases relating to a woman's capacity to administer the community property, to choose and keep a job or economic activity and to choose a domicile. If women are not enjoying their personal rights, it is due more to ignorance and lack of education and to the weight of custom, which continues to bear heavily upon them.

CHAPTER XIV

WOMEN IN RELATION TO CERTAIN ASPECTS OF FAMILY LAW

(Article 16)

The provisions of article 16 concern questions relating to civil status. In Cameroon, these questions are governed by various pieces of legislation, in particular:

- the Civil Code;
- Law No. 69/LF-3 of 14 June 1969 regulating the use of names, first names and pseudonyms;
- Ordinance No. 81/02 of 29 June 1981 organizing the registry of births, marriages and deaths and various provisions relating to civil status.

The coexistence of written and customary law leads to a certain amount of friction. This legal dualism finds expression in the administration of justice. In fact, there are courts of written law and customary courts which have almost the same powers in matters of marriage, filiation, succession, etc.

More detailed information concerning the various aspects of article 16 of the Convention is provided below.

XIV.1. WOMEN AND THE RIGHT TO ENTER INTO MARRIAGE

Under the law, men and women have the same right to enter into marriage and freely choose a spouse. However, there is a difference with respect to the minimum age at which they can marry. Thus, article 52 of the Ordinance of 29 June 1981 establishes a minimum age of 18 for boys and 15 for girls.

The question of consent is dealt with in the Ordinance of 29 June 1981:

Article 64(1): "The future husband and wife shall personally signify their consent to the registrar at the time of solemnization of the marriage."

Article 64(2): "The consent of a minor future husband or wife shall not be valid unless supported by that of the father and mother. This consent must be free and without defect."

Article 65(1): "The marriage shall not be solemnized if consent has been obtained by duress."

At the same time, in Cameroon under the ordinary law the form of marriage is polygamy. Thus, a man may have several wives, sometimes in disregard of the initial matrimonial system in the case of a monogamic first marriage. Where there is a finding of bigamy, the second marriage is null and void.

XIV.2. EXERCISE OF CONJUGAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

According to articles 213 and 214 of the Civil Code:

- "The husband shall be the head of the family and the wife shall replace him in his capacity of family head if he is unable to express his wishes because of incapacity, absence or distance or for any other reason.

- The wife shall cooperate with the husband in giving the family moral and material guidance, providing for its upkeep, bringing up the children and preparing them to set up on their own.

- The obligation to assume these responsibilities shall fall principally on the husband. He must provide his wife with all the necessities of life according to his abilities and status.

- The wife shall contribute to the household expenses through her marriage settlement and community contributions and through the withdrawals she may make from the personal resources which she retains the right to administer."

For its part, article 215 of the Civil Code stipulates that "the choice of family residence shall belong to the husband, the wife shall be obliged to live with him and he must accept her. Exceptionally, if the residence chosen by the husband places the family at physical or moral risk, the wife may be authorized to have, for herself and her children, another residence to be determined by the judge."

These are the conjugal rights and responsibilities exercised by women. Their rights in the event of the marriage being dissolved are described below.

XIV.3. THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN THE EVENT OF THE MARRIAGE BEING DISSOLVED

1. Forms of dissolution

Under the terms of article 77 of the Ordinance of 1981 and article 227 of the Civil Code, marriage is dissolved by the death of a spouse or by divorce decreed by the courts.

(a) Dissolution as a result of the death of the husband

In this situation, the law protects the widow. Thus, the above-mentioned article 77 states that "in the event of the death of the husband, his heirs may not claim any right over the person, liberty or share of the estate of the widow who, upon the expiration of a period of 180 days from the death of her husband, may freely remarry, without anyone being able to claim compensation or material benefit by way of dowry or otherwise, whether upon engagement or at the time of the marriage or subsequently."

It should be pointed out that the period of 180 days during which the woman may not marry is intended to avoid any confusion with regard to paternity.

Although this provision favours women, customary practices such as levirate (according to which when the husband dies the widow or widows must remain in the family as wives of the dead man's brothers) infringe the woman's right to inherit and her liberty.

Thus, these customary practices restrict the wife's management of the husband's estate. The situation becomes even more complicated when the husband's family has to issue the minutes of the family council, a document often required by the court as part of the file in inheritance cases.

(b) Dissolution of the marriage by divorce

In Cameroon, divorce is granted for a matrimonial offence.

There is no discrimination with respect to the grounds for divorce or the procedure to be followed. The only difficulty for the wife is in providing evidence of her husband's adultery since article 361 of the Criminal Code characterizes the offence of adultery differently for men and women. Thus, a wife may be punished for adultery as soon as she is found to have had sexual relations with a man other than her husband, no matter how often or in what place. The husband, on the other hand, is culpable only if he has had sexual relations with women other than his wife or wives in the matrimonial home or indulged in them habitually outside the matrimonial home.

2. Effects of the dissolution of a marriage

These effects concern the personal relationship between the spouses, their property rights and the children.

(a) Personal relationship

The effects are identical. There is no longer any obligation to cohabit, remain faithful, lead a conjugal life or aid and assist each other. However, the last-mentioned obligation may take the form of maintenance for one spouse or the other.

(b) Property rights

The dissolution of the marriage bond also entails the dissolution of the matrimonial property regime, though the assets are divided up in accordance with the regime chosen at the time of solemnization of the marriage. If no such choice was made, the legal regime applicable to the spouses when they come before the courts of written law will be that of community of movables and after-acquired property.

Where the property of the spouses is concerned, the effects of divorce extend back to the date of the application for divorce (art. 252 of the Civil Code). It is on that date that community will be deemed to have been dissolved. In this way, the law seeks to prevent the husband from exerting his paternal authority during the proceedings, to the detriment of his wife's interests.

Moreover, once the divorce becomes final, the right of the spouses to inherit from each other on intestacy is also extinguished.

Before the customary courts, the wives are sometimes at a disadvantage since they must provide evidence of their contribution to the conjugal assets.

(c) The children

Article 302 of the Civil Code reads as follows: "The children shall be entrusted to the spouse who has obtained the divorce." However, their interests are amply taken into account and may require the judge to order, for the children's greater good, that all or some of them be placed in the care of a wife who lost the divorce case or even in that of a third party. To satisfy himself in this respect, the judge may order the social services to carry out an investigation as a basis for his decision.

The judge will also arrange for the other parent to have access to the children.

Custody is provisional and at the discretion of the court. That is to say it is controlled by the judge who may make changes if the interests of the children so require.

XIV.4. RIGHTS OF THE WIFE WITH RESPECT TO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN IN NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

Article 203 of the Civil Code places both parents under an obligation to give their child moral and material guidance.

1. Parental authority

(a) In a legitimate family, parental authority belongs to the father and the mother unless one of them has been deprived of it because of his or her behaviour or because of loss of physical or mental capacity. In the case of illegitimate children, parental authority is exercised by the parent with respect to whom filiation has been established. This is automatic in the case of the mother for whom childbirth is equivalent to recognition.

(b) In the event of divorce, parental authority belongs to the parent who has effective custody of the child. In the event of death, authority belongs to the surviving parent.

2. Guardianship

(a) For legitimate children, under the terms of article 389 of the Civil Code, "during the lifetime of the spouses, the father shall be the legal administrator of the property of their minor children not regarded as of full age and capacity, with the exception of any gift or bequest made on the express condition that it be administered by a third party.

When the father is deprived of the powers of administration, the mother shall become the administrator as of right in his place with the same powers as he had, without his marital authorization being required.

(b) In the event of divorce or judicial separation, the spouse to which the custody of the child is entrusted shall be the one responsible for administering its property, unless otherwise ordered".

The property of illegitimate children is administered by the parent with respect to whom filiation has been established.

Where adoption is concerned, the conditions for adoption apply to both spouses without distinction as to sex.

Upon the death of their parents, the children will be the principal heirs regardless of their sex. However, there is a difference in relation to the status of the child, since the legitimate child does not have the same rights as the acknowledged illegitimate child, the latter being entitled to half the share he would have received had he been legitimate.

Although the status of the married woman is regulated, this is not the case where the cohabitation of two unmarried partners is concerned.

XIV.5. COHABITATION

In Cameroon, the law does not recognize unmarried cohabitation. Consequently, it has no legal effect. The issue of such a union are illegitimate. If recognized, they have the right to claim maintenance and their share of their parents' estate.

The practice of promising a child in marriage has now almost died out.

XIV.6. THE DOWRY

The dowry is governed by the Civil Code which in arts. 1540 and 1541 defines it as follows: "The dowry is the property which the wife brings to the husband for bearing the costs of the marriage. Everything that the wife brings with her or that is given to her under the marriage contract .., unless otherwise stipulated."

However, in tribal practice, the dowry may be defined as the goods which a future husband contributes to the family of his future wife.

Ordinance 81-02 of 29 June 1981 concerning the organization of civil status, which deals with the customary dowry, does not define it.

However, the dowry is not a condition of the validity of the marriage.

Thus, article 70(1) reads: "The total or partial payment or non-payment of the dowry and the total or partial performance or non-performance of any marriage contract shall have no effect on the validity of the marriage."

(2) "Any action challenging the validity of a marriage based on the total or partial non-performance of a dotal or marriage settlement shall be inadmissible as a matter of public policy."

At the same time, according to article 72: "The total or partial payment of a dowry cannot in any circumstances form the basis for natural paternity which can only result from the existence of a blood relationship between the child and its father."

The law also envisages two situations in which the dowry must be returned. It follows from article 71(2) of the 1981 Ordinance that if the engagement is broken off, the depositary must return it immediately.

Similarly, according to article 73: "In the event of the dissolution of the marriage by divorce, the beneficiary of the dowry may be ordered to repay it, in whole or in part, if the court considers that he or she is totally or partially responsible for the disunion."

Furthermore, article 357 of the Criminal Code characterizes wrongfully demanding a dowry as an offence and punishes with 3 months to 5 years' imprisonment or a fine of 5,000 to 500,000 francs or both:

- anyone who by promising to marry a woman already married or still engaged receives from a third party all or part of a dowry;

- anyone who receives all or part of a dowry without having reimbursed any ousted suitor;

- anyone who, lacking capacity, receives all or part of a dowry with a view to marrying a woman;

- anyone who demands all or part of an excessive dowry on the occasion of the marriage of a daughter over the age of 21 or of a widow or divorcee;

- anyone who, while demanding an excessive dowry, bars for this reason alone the marriage of a daughter under the age of 21.

Other aspects linked with personal and property rights are implicit in article 16 of the Convention, for example, the right of women to have their say concerning family planning, to choose a family name and a profession and to enjoy household property.

XIV.7. THE EXERCISE BY WOMEN OF FAMILY PLANNING AND OTHER PERSONAL RIGHTS

1. The right of women freely to plan births

There is no law or regulation that prevents women from freely and responsibly deciding the number and spacing of their children. They have access, without the need to request authorization from anyone, to the information and services provided by the family planning centres scattered all over the country. However, it should be pointed out that their exercise of this right is impeded, among other things, by illiteracy, poverty, the inaccessibility of information and cultural restraints, especially where rural women are concerned.

Although the right to reproductive health is recognized and respected in Cameroon, nevertheless, before taking any permanent step to control a married woman's procreative function (such as ligating the tubes), the doctors require the husband's prior written authorization which she is obliged to produce.

2. The right of women to choose a family name, a profession and an occupation

(a) Choice of a family name

Law 69/LF/3 of 14 June 1969 regulating the use of names, first names and pseudonyms does not contain any discriminatory provision giving the husband the exclusive right to choose the family name. However, the general practice is for married women to take their husband's name. Thus, a married woman can use two names: her maiden name and the name of her husband.

This right to use the name of the husband is optional. A married woman is not obliged nor is it her duty to take her husband's name. When she is required to identify herself, she is free to use her maiden name rather than that of her husband. However, the use of the husband's name by the wife should not be injurious to him or third parties.

In the event of divorce, the wife may continue to use the name of her husband, unless he forbids it.

(b) The right of women to choose a profession or an occupation

Article 74(1) of the 1981 Ordinance reads as follows: "A married woman may pursue a profession separate from that of her husband." The exercise of this right by the wife is restricted by reservations set out in the following articles:

- According to article 74(2): "The husband may object to the pursuit of such a profession in the interests of the marriage and the children."

- Article 223 of the Civil Code takes a similar line: "A married woman may pursue a profession separate from that of her husband, unless the latter objects."

Nevertheless, the law does make exceptions to the exercise of the husband's right to object.

- The same article continues: "If the husband's objection is not justified by the interests of the family, the wife may be authorized by decision of the court to ignore it, in which case any professional commitments she has entered into since the objection was raised shall be valid."

This latter provision enables women to avoid finding themselves at the mercy of a husband who may sometimes be acting in bad faith.

3. The right of women to own, acquire, manage and dispose of property

Women's right of ownership, which according to the Constitution is the right to use, enjoy and dispose of one's property, is not fully recognized in view of certain provisions of the Civil Code and the Commercial Code relating, respectively, to the administration of statutory community property and bankruptcy.

(a) Provisions of the Civil Code

Article 1421: "The husband shall administer the community property on his own. He may sell, transfer or mortgage it without the consent of his wife."

Article 1428: "The husband shall administer all the personal property of his wife. He may independently exercise any right of action to recover movable property or to protect or recover possession vested in the wife. He may not dispose of his wife's personal real property without her consent. He shall be responsible for any physical depreciation of his wife's personal property due to failure to take protective action."

(b) Provisions of the Commercial Code

Articles 557 and 558: These articles protect a married woman whose trader husband goes bankrupt.

Article 559: This restricts the free enjoyment of her property by the wife of the bankrupt.

Thus, according to this article, "Whatever the regime under which the marriage contract was drawn up, apart from the case envisaged in art. 558 (acquisition of property by inheritance or gift), the legal presumption shall be that the property acquired by the wife of the bankrupt belongs to her husband, has been paid for with his money and must be pooled with the main body of his assets, unless the wife can show otherwise."

Over and above the written provisions which make the woman in some respects "a person lacking legal capacity" who must be protected by the husband, most of our usages and customs incorporate retrograde principles according to which a woman is incapable of owning property and especially land, all the more so as she herself is regarded as an inheritable good.

CONCLUSION

The women of Cameroon have always played several important roles in society: the role of wife, the role of mother and the role of participant in the development of the country. However, their contribution to development has not been adequately recognized and their potential has not been properly tapped.

Since the 1960s, through the United Nations, the international community, aware of women's role as partners in development, has mobilized to promote action on their behalf. Thus, it has worked to establish a theoretical framework and subsequently to provide the means to support national programmes aimed at improving the lives of women.

For its part, Cameroon has not let this international movement pass it by. Its interest in the advancement of women is reflected in the progressive introduction of appropriate national mechanisms and the implementation of multisectoral programmes.

Despite these notable efforts, it must be acknowledged that Cameroonian women are still the victims of discrimination of every kind. Although the legislation in general appears to be egalitarian and non-discriminatory, the reality is that women are daily subjected to de facto discriminatory practices associated with constraints of a socio-cultural nature (resistance to change due to a conservative mentality, ways and customs that recognize patriarchy as the model for society, stereotypes, clichés and social prejudice).

It is clear, moreover, that the steps taken to improve the social and legal status of women do not always have the expected effect due to the existence of numerous obstacles such as:

- the dual legal system which Cameroon has inherited from the colonial period and the conflict between the written law and local customs and religions;

- the lack of a clear and precise definition of discrimination and discriminatory practices that would enable women victims to set the legal and/or administrative machinery in motion in order to end them;

- illiteracy among women and their generally low level of education;

- inadequacy of the resources (financial, material and human) allocated to the mechanisms for the advancement of women;

- the difficult international economic climate characterized by the existence of structural adjustment programmes, external debt and globalization of the economy;

- women's diffidence about participating in the improvement of their status.

Admittedly, the rate at which these problems are being solved is slow, but the existence of a series of favourable factors makes it possible to view the future with optimism. These include:

- the political will to succeed expressed, on the one hand, in the preparation of a National Action Plan for the Integration of Women in Development whose implementation should certainly enable the difficulties to be progressively overcome and, on the other hand, in the framing of a policy with three main goals:
  - the maintenance of growth;
  - the eradication of poverty;
  - the development of human resources;
- the growing awareness of the female population reflected in the quantitative and qualitative development of the women's association movement;
- the availability of sources of financing for projects to improve women's lives;
- the economic recovery which will enable the State to allocate more resources to the institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women;
- the involvement of the private sector and civil society in women's issues.

Finally, the preparation of periodic reports on the implementation of the Convention, which necessarily involves an evaluation of the action taken and the future prospects, will undoubtedly give new impetus to the movement to improve the status of women.

References

LEGAL TEXTS

A. CONVENTIONS

1. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

2. Universal Declaration of Human Rights

3. ILO Convention No. 100 on Equality of Remuneration, 1951

B. CONSTITUTION

4. Law No. 96-06 of 18 January 1996 to amend the Constitution of 2 June 1972

C. CODES

5. Civil Code

6. Commercial Code

7. Criminal Code (Law No. 65-LF-24 of 12 November 1965 and Law No. 67-LF-1 of 12 June 1967)

8. Labour Code (Law No. 92/007 of 14 August 1992)

9. Cameroonian Nationality Code (Law No. 68-LF-3 of 11 June 1968)

D. LAWS

10. Law No. 69/LF/3 of 14 June 1969 regulating the use of names, first names and pseudonyms

11. Law No. 90/56 of 19 December 1990 on political parties

12. Law No. 90/53 of 19 December 1990 establishing freedom of association

13. Law No. 90/062 of 19 December 1990 granting a special exemption for health care units

14. Law No. 92/006 of 14 August 1992 on cooperative societies and joint initiative groups

15. Law No. 93/015 of 22 December 1993 on economic interest groups

16. Law No. 96/03 of 4 January 1996 establishing a framework law in the field of health relating to the protection and advancement of vulnerable groups

17. Law No. 98/004 of 14 April 1998 on educational guidance

18. Law No. 98/006 of 14 April 1998 regulating tourism

E. ORDINANCES

19. Ordinance No. 59/66 of 28 November 1959 instituting Cameroonian nationality

20. Ordinance No. 73/17 of 22 May 1973 concerning the organization of social security

21. Ordinance No. 81/02 of 29 June 1981 concerning the organization of civil status and various provisions relating to personal status

F. DECREES

22. Decree No. 84/95 of 26 March 1984 concerning the organization of the Ministry of Women's Affairs

23. Decree No. 84/324 of 28 May 1984 establishing the Consultative Committee for the Advancement of Women

24. Decree No. 88/993 of 15 July 1988 ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

25. Decree No. 88/1281 of 21 September 1988 concerning the organization of the Ministry of Social and Women's Affairs

26. Decree No. 94/199 of 7 October 1994 establishing the Civil Service Regulations

27. Decree No. 95/013 of 7 February 1995 concerning the organization of the basic health services in health districts

28. Decree No. 95/040 of 7 March 1995 concerning the organization of the Ministry of Public Health

29. Decree No. 95/100 of 9 June 1995 establishing the Ministry of Social and Women's Affairs

30. Decree No. 95/205 of 7 December 1995 concerning the organization of the Government

G. ORDER

31. Order No. 84/MTPS/IMT of 24 November 1984 establishing the conditions of hygiene and safety in the workplace

H. CIRCULAR LETTER

32. Circular Letter No. 10/A/562/MINEDUC/ESG/SAP of 10 January 1980 on the readmission of pupils suspended following a case of pregnancy

I. OTHER SOURCES

33. Annual statistics of MINEDUC, 1995

34. Cameroon Tribune No. 6644 of 21 July 1998

35. Draft New Policy of Education, 1997

36. Civil Service Record, 1995

37. Higher Institute of Public Management, 1996

38. Report on Human Development in Cameroon, 1996

39. Summary of General Population and Housing Census, 1987

40. Report of the Education Forum, 1995